

**PEOPLE FROM THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND THEIR LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF WAR, EXILE, AND RESETTLEMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

The latest war in the former Yugoslavia officially ended with the Dayton Agreement in December of 1995. As the country disintegrated, people of the former Yugoslavia suffered enormous losses. One whole way of living disappeared. Many of these people were forced to leave their homes and find shelter elsewhere. In most of these cases, there was no way back and people had to resettle in other countries. To live through and experience war, exile, and resettlement implies experiencing multiple traumas. Over the last two decades, researchers became interested in studying positive psychological experiences of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) in people who lived through traumatic life events. Also, psychological process of meaning making out of adverse events occupied researchers' interest. These have been attempts to broaden our perspectives on experiencing trauma, in addition to studying psychological distress. This study attempted to find potential evidence of posttraumatic growth, psychological distress, and meaning making process in participants' stories in order to verify if these concepts are viable for sample of people from the former Yugoslavia. Five participants from the former Yugoslavia, 2 men and 3 women, were asked to share their stories about their personal lived experience of war, exile, and resettlement. These stories were explored and analyzed in order to see how people construct their stories and make meaning out of their life experiences. Also, the stories were scrutinized for evidence of any positive or negative changes in the aftermath of severely disturbing events. The main question asked in this research was "How do people from the former Yugoslavia describe their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement?" Throughout the interviews, it became obvious that these people were still experiencing a significant amount of emotional

distress and that negative psychological effects resulting from these life experiences were still present. Several themes in this study were common for all participants: negative psychological effects, walking shells, and dreaming of return. No evidence of experiencing PTG was found with these participants who still struggle to make sense out of these events. This might indicate that the concept of PTG should not be readily assumed when working with clients from this world region and clients who experienced these multiple adverse life events.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all refugees, past and present, from the former Yugoslavia with hope they find their inner peace...

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia (Figure 1) used to be a country in the South East Europe that covered about 255,697 square kilometers. That was three times the size of Austria and larger than the size of Great Britain (Palmer, 1964). The main language spoken in Yugoslavia was Serbo-Croatian. Slovenian was spoken mainly in Slovenia and Macedonian in Macedonia. However, most people throughout Yugoslavia could speak Serbo-Croatian. According to 1991 census, Yugoslavia had population of 23,542,815 inhabitants (Stanovništvo Jugoslavije, 2009). It consisted of 6 republics and 2 autonomous regions (Table 1).

Republic	Population	Ethnic groups
Slovenia	1,965,986	88% Sl, 3% C, 2% S, 1%M, 6% O*
Croatia	4,784,265	78% C, 12% S, 10% O
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,377,033	40 % M, 32% S, 18%C, 5.5% Yu 4.5% O
Montenegro	615,035	62%Mo, 5% M, 9% S, 7% A, 7% O
Macedonia	2,033,964	65% Ma, 22%A, 4%T, 3%R, 2% S, 4%O
Serbia	5,790,803	87% S, 4% H, 4% Yu, 2% Mo, 1% C, 1% R, 1% O
(Vojvodina) – AR	(2,031,992)	60%S, 17%H, 9%Yu, 4%C, 3%Slo, 2 % Mo, 2%Rmn, 1%R 2%O
(Kosovo) – AR	(1,956,196)	82% A, 10%S, 3%M, 2% R, 1%Mo 2%O

Table 1. Population and the ethnic makeup in the former Yugoslavia

*Sl=Slovenes M=Muslims S=Serbs C=Croats Mo=Montenegrians A= Albanians
Ma=Macedonians T=Turks H=Hungarians R=Roma Rmn=Romanians Yu= Yugoslavs
O=Other

There were 6 natural geographical zones in Yugoslavia. The first was the extension of the Alps, which covers western Slovenia. The second zone spreads along the Adriatic coast and has Mediterranean vegetation and Mediterranean climate. Behind

the Adriatic coast, there is the Dinaric Chain of mountains, which runs down the entire country, broadens in the south and continues into Albania and Greece. The mountains are cut by lots of short, fast-flowing streams and by a deep fjord, the Boka Kotorska. East of this chain are alluvial plains of the rivers Danube and Sava, stretching from the Austrain frontiers to Vojvodina. The sixth zone was the Balkan Mountains that swept across Macedonia (Palmer, 1964).

At the beginning of the XX century, two thirds of the Yugoslav lands were within the Austro-Hungarian or Turkish Empires. Only Serbia and Montenegro were independent countries at the time. They became independent in 1878 at the Berlin Congress. The first Yugoslavia was created in 1918 after the WWI. Even though some foreigners thought that the state of Yugoslavia was against common sense with so many different nationalities, cultures, and religions, there were three binding forces. The majority of the people were South Slavs, the majority of people shared a common language, and together these people could resist outside oppression. During the WWI groups of Croats and Slovenes who had escaped from Austria-Hungary joined the Serbs, who fought valiantly on the same side as British and French, in striving for the right of all south Slavs to determine their political future after the war ended. This first country was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and king of Serbia ruled over this country. In 1929 the king established the dictatorship in Yugoslavia and subsequently King Alexander was assassinated at Marseilles in 1934.

In 1941, Yugoslavia collapsed after less than 2 weeks fighting with Germany and its allies. Without declaring the war, Germany mass bombed Belgrade on the early morning of April 6th of 1941 after which they invaded the country. Then civil war came,

and the people of Yugoslavia experienced horrors like no other country. Local fanatics' cruelty shocked even invaders. The population of Yugoslavia was decimated in WWII when 1,700,000 lost their lives. The second Yugoslavia was born out of this experience.



Figure 1. Ethnic map of the former Yugoslavia (CIA, 1989)

The second Yugoslavia was created in 1945 with marshal Tito as the head of one-party communist state. Yugoslavia parted with the USSR in 1948, and developed its own system that no other country had. The workers' self-management system tried to combine the Western efficacy with Marxist philosophy. Even though this system was full of imperfections, Yugoslavia prospered at great pace. The standard of living was much higher than in other communist countries (Borowiec, 1979). In addition to this, Yugoslavia had a policy of free frontiers where citizens were able to travel and work abroad. Yugoslavia was also a leader of non-aligned nations and was a recognized member of the international community. Economic growth was significant up until early 80's. Tito was a powerful and charismatic leader and after his death Yugoslavia started having problems. It seems that a combination of internal and external factors contributed to the collapse of the country in the 1990's. Potential internal factors that contributed to this collapse were: economic crises, foreign debt, hyperinflation, unemployment, corruption, and nationalism (Lidal, 1989). Potential external factors that influenced Yugoslavia were the collapse of eastern block, the fact that Yugoslavia was the only remaining communist country in the area, and significant activity of right wing extremism of Croatia and Serbia that had been very active abroad (Borowiec, 1979, Lidal, 1989). The legacy of this war is a huge death toll, a huge number of refugees, destroyed resources, and ethnic animosity that will live on.

Researcher's subjectivity

I came to Canada 14 years ago from Serbia where I lived for 2 years after I had to leave Sarajevo. My ancestors lived in what used to be Yugoslavia for a very long time, and in Bosnia for several hundred years, both from my father and mother's side. I also was born and lived in Sarajevo my whole life until the war began. My life was there. I left for vacations to different places, but I never considered living anywhere else. This place was where everything was, family, friends, home. I knew all the places, lots of people, and everything felt close and familiar. I belonged. I liked the diversity that Sarajevo and Bosnia had, this place where Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims, and Jews lived together for a long time in the same city. I knew the most important customs from all religions, I knew all celebrations and how to go about them.

When the war started in Sarajevo, I did not believe it would last long. Actually, at first, it felt strange and unreal, like a movie. In the first days of war, I would go out to see the streets because everything looked different. But then, it started to get more serious. We stopped going out of the apartment completely, grenades were flying around, military tanks were passing by the buildings, and food was running out. I vividly remember one Sunday in April of 1992, about five weeks after the start of the war. It was a mild spring afternoon, I was watching through the window at the lime trees outside. It was very calm, there was no wind, and I thought how strange it felt not to see people on the street. Streets were completely empty. The contrast of the beautiful spring day and the ominous situation that we were in was frightening. My realization that I could not go out was defeating. Up to that point, I felt strong in my town and I did not feel fear. This was the first time when I finally realized that something very serious was happening.

After that time, the situation quickly worsened, we heard that people were leaving the city, but I did not want to leave because I did not know where I would go. My sister and my mother did not want to leave either, and my father was the only one who was scared and anxious for us to leave the city. It seems that he was the only one who understood how difficult and unpredictable this situation could turn out to be. He was twelve years old when the Second World War started, and he remembered that war well. His father was killed in that war, and his mother was tortured in front of her five children. My father was the oldest of five.

After a long talk one night, my family decided to leave. In order to leave the city, we needed to split up to be less visible. We were afraid that armed people in the building or on the street might start asking us questions and not let us go. My sister and I left first, and my parents left the day after. That morning, as my sister and I were about to leave our home, my mother was standing in the hallway to see us leaving; I will never forget the expression my mother had on her face. She was not saying anything, she only watched us. My father was rushing us to make sure that we got out soon because the bombing stopped and it was quiet on the street. That was the last moment in my home where I lived my whole life. We never returned back. My sister and I fled first for Serbia, and then my parents left Sarajevo but stayed in Bosnia. We never returned, they never returned. The only belongings we had were the clothes we were wearing at the time. We heard later that in about 10 days after we left Sarajevo, some people moved into our apartment. We knew what happened in cases like that. These people kept everything they liked and needed and destroyed everything else. I thought I made peace with not having any physical memories from my past. I was already in Vancouver in

1995 when I ran into one of my Sarajevo's neighbors on Robson Street. He told me how his aunt, who was my first neighbor in Sarajevo, got very upset when she saw my parent's wedding photograph in the garbage container in front of the building. She did not dare take it, and honestly it was not worth a risk when everything else was destroyed anyway. I had a hard time dismissing this image from my mind, but then I realized that all that is not important. Life is bigger than photographs.

Many things have happened in my life from the day I left Sarajevo and many adversities have been overcome. Now, my sister and I live in Canada, my father passed away almost three years ago, and my mother lives alone in Bosnia. There was this sense of a terrible tragedy and enormous devastation for so many people that I had to struggle with. In my own story, it is not only that I got separated from my family and relatives and I lost my physical home and all belongings, I also lost my friends, community, country, and culture. What a struggle it has been for me to come to terms with these events, and to understand and accept that what happened cannot be changed, and the things cannot be as they were before. But it seems that our entire human history has been "a paradox of devastation and recovery – an ebb and flow of suffering and disintegration, alternating with social unity and hope" (deVries, 1996, p.399). And as I go on living, I try to make the best of my life, but this does not go without being sad because of what happened.

When I thought of topics that I wanted to research, for the longest time, I did not want to pursue this one because it was very personal and painful, but it continued coming back to me. These events would not be denied, and they asked to be talked about again and again. Nothing else had the same meaning and importance for me. There is a power

and creative energy in the stories about difficult times that we lived and witnessed firsthand (Herman, 1992). That is why I explored stories people from the former Yugoslavia construct about their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement. I do believe that we learn valuable things from stories people tell on how they managed to go on even though the unimaginable happened and that is the main topic of this research study.

Research question and purpose of the study

This research study is deeply personal, it stems from my need to understand how other people deal with events that are extremely disruptive and how they manage to come out of these extremely difficult times, find new meanings, strength, and joy in living.

The main research question I asked in this study was “How do people from the former Yugoslavia describe their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement?” The purpose of this study was to explore the stories people from the former Yugoslavia construct about their experiences of war, exile, and resettlement to arrive at a better understanding of the meaning making process and positive changes that might occur in the aftermath of living through severely disturbing events.

My interest in the topic of the meaning making process and eventual positive changes creates additional questions that I wanted to explore in this study: What is the process of meaning making that people go through after trauma of war, exile, and resettlement? What are the factors that are important for this process? Because of these experiences, how have participants’ values, identities, perspectives, and expectations changed? Because of these experiences, how have their goals, purposes, and individual

beliefs changed? Is there evidence of positive changes in the aftermath of trauma? Is there evidence of continuing distress?

Why are these experiences important to study?

After people experience a traumatic event, “the range of reactions is possible” (van der Kolk, 1996, p.162). In the scientific literature, traditionally, the focus has been mainly on psychological disorder that can result from encounter with trauma. However, as it has been documented (Joseph & Linley, 2008; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998), there are other types of responses people can have to trauma, but these have not been studied as heavily as PTSD. Any understanding of reactions to trauma must take account of potential for positive as well as negative changes if it is to be considered comprehensive (Joseph & Linley, 2008).

In the last decade, the research on positive changes following a traumatic experience has been growing. However, the majority of published research is North American and this notion of posttraumatic growth and what it consists of came primarily from North American samples. The posttraumatic growth inventory (PTGI) identifies five domains of PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). These are: greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one’s life; and spiritual development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). It has been found, however, that different groups have different structures of posttraumatic growth. A study of Bosnian war refugees in Sarajevo (Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2003) shows a somewhat different factor structure in a translated version of PTGI. Also, the overall means were considerably lower than reported in most studies (Powell et al., 2003). This

might indicate that people from cultures other than North American might have different patterns of understanding of change after trauma and different patterns of growth (Pals & McAdams, 2004).

Therefore, I hoped that this study might shed some light on the process of meaning making and positive changes in the aftermath of severe trauma in a sample from former Yugoslavia and might also identify different growth patterns for this culturally different sample. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), who coined the term posttraumatic growth, little is known in general about the processes, concomitants, and experiences of this phenomenon.

In addition to a theoretical contribution, this study has clinical implications as well. It may help clinicians to know more about the process that people go through when they deal with significant negative life events. They should be aware of the potential for positive change in their clients following trauma and adversity. They should also be aware of the different ways of expressing these positive feelings about difficult experiences. If they understand better the possible range of reactions, counsellors will be better positioned to facilitate the integration of the negative experiences and promote positive change in the aftermath of trauma. Furthermore, the research in counselling psychology has consistently supported meaning in life importance through studies that established positive relations between meaning and positive affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism (Frazier et. al., 2006). It is hoped that my study will contribute to the study of optimal human functioning through trying to understand the ways meaning develops in the face of adversity (Frazier et. al., 2006).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to present current theory and research that are important for my study and serve as its framework. The concepts that are important for this study are posttraumatic stress, posttraumatic growth, and meaning making.

Theory of trauma and posttraumatic stress

Scientific study of trauma started in the late XIX century with works of Janet, Charcot, and Freud, however; it waited almost a century to get an official diagnosis in DSM-III as posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). This was an important milestone as it created an organized framework for the systematic study of trauma and “the scientific investigation of the nature of human suffering” (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p.5). PTSD is a psychological disorder that might develop in the aftermath of severely distressing event that is experienced with intense fear, terror and helplessness. The usual symptoms are hyperarousal, numbing, avoidance, and reexperiencing the event (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

It has been found that a high percentage of refugees suffer from PTSD and depression among both community and clinical population. The empirical evidence suggests that over time symptoms diminish, even though a considerable number of people remain symptomatic. In the longitudinal study (Vojvoda, D., Weine, S. M., McGlashan, T., Becker, D. F., Southwick, S.M., 2008) with Bosnian refugees, it has been found that 31/2 years after resettlement in the USA 24% of the sample (sample of 45 participants) was still symptomatic in comparison to 76% shortly after arriving. Similar findings have been found in other studies. Schmidt, Kravic, and Ehlert (2008) compared PTSD and self-concept in 29 Bosnian refugee women currently residing in Switzerland

and Liechtenstein with 26 women who were internally displaced in northern Bosnia and 32 non-displaced women. They found PTSD symptoms present in all three groups; however, the internal refugees had more severe symptoms than other two groups. Sundquist, K., Johansson, L-M., DeMarinis, V., Johansson, S-E., and Sundquist, J., (2005) found that the prevalence of PTSD symptoms among the Bosnian women 3-4 years after arrival in Sweden were 28.3% and also these women were at significantly higher risks of symptoms of other psychological disorders, especially depression and anxiety when compared to Swedish control group. Momartin, S., Silove, D., Manicavasagar, V., and Steel, Z. (2004) found that not only refugees have a high level of PTSD symptoms but also they have a high level of comorbid disorders, especially depression and this combination might be particularly disabling and associated with longer-term psychosocial dysfunction.

Thulesius and Hakarsson (1999) used a larger sample than most other studies. They screened a consecutive cohort of 206 Bosnian refugees and found the prevalence of 18 to 33% among refugees in comparison to .3 to 1% among the participants in the comparison group. While refugee experiences resemble combat veterans experiences, it was found that refugees report more reexperiencing than avoidance symptoms, and this is consistent with findings from Holocaust survivor literature (Vojvoda et al., 2008).

In his theory of trauma, van der Kolk (1996) explains how the human body remembers trauma. Brain, body, and mind are inextricably linked, and it seems that trauma affects people on multiple levels of biological functioning. So we can talk about psychophysiological effects, neurohormonal effects, neuroanatomical effects, and immunological effects of trauma.

Abnormal psychophysiological reactions occur in response to specific reminders of the trauma, and in response to intense but neutral stimuli, suggesting a loss of stimulus discrimination. People with PTSD have a highly elevated autonomic response (i.e., a significant increase in heart rate, skin conductance, and blood pressure) to sounds, images, and thoughts related to specific traumatic incidents. The trauma response is complex: hypermnnesia, hyperreactivity to stimuli, and traumatic reexperiencing coexist with psychic numbing, amnesia, avoidance, and anhedonia. Emotions lose their function to alert people to pay attention to what is happening. People with PTSD go from stimulus to response without being able to figure out what is presently happening, but rather they have fight-or-flight reactions, which cause them to freeze, or overreact and intimidate others. Ultimately, these people may experience having feelings as dangerous and to be avoided. Traumatized people try to compensate for their chronic hyperarousal by “shutting down” on a behavioural level, by avoiding stimuli that remind them of the trauma, and on a psychobiological level, by emotional numbing to both trauma-related and everyday experience.

When an organism is under the stress, stress hormones, like catecholamines, serotonin, hormones of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and endogenous opioids get released to help organism to deal with the stress effectively. In people with PTSD, there is a chronically increased sympathetic nervous system activity, which means that increased levels of norepinephrine cause a down-regulation of adrenergic receptors. There is a low urinary cortisol excretion and there is a decreased CNS serotonin level, which in humans is implicated in impulsivity and aggression. Lastly, nature provides protection against pain via stress-induced analgesia. It was noticed in the WWII that

strong emotions could block pain. Today it is known that this is attributed to the release of endogenous opioids, which inhibit pain and reduce panic. Both excessive endogenous opioids and norepinephrine interfere with the storage of experience in explicit memory. Freezing and numbing responses may help organisms not to experience traumatic event consciously or not to remember a situation of trauma but this also keep people from learning from experience.

Amygdala and hippocampus are limbic structures that evaluate the emotional meaning and record the spatial and temporal dimensions of experience. It has been found that people who suffer from PTSD also experience shrinkage in the hippocampus. This might be the effect of increased levels of cortisol. Also, it has been found that when people re-experience a traumatic event, the amygdala is very active while Broca's area is turned off. This might suggest that people with PTSD experience emotions physically without having words attached to these emotions. It seems that these people are not able to integrate successfully their affects and thoughts and this results in a high non-reflective reactivity to the environment.

It has long been speculated that traumatic stress might undermine the immune system. It was found that women with history of chronic sexual abuse have significant immunological abnormalities. It is still hard to tell in what way these findings will help to improve lives of people with PTSD (van der Kolk, 1996).

The trauma gets "engraved" in the human body with a mode of thinking that is characterized by powerful images, feelings, and sensations which do not go away after a traumatic event. When time fails to heal the trauma, PTSD takes over. In this case,

traumatic events continue to exist independently and they do not get integrated and accepted as past experiences (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996).

Judith Herman (1992) says, “Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless” (p.33). Herman says that trauma leaves a legacy in a disrupted body, disrupted sense of self, disrupted social relationships, and disrupted sense of meaning. She also speaks about commonalities between people who experience different type of traumas as they potentially suffer similar psychological harm. She points out that the traumatic symptoms between victims are as similar as their recovery. According to Herman, the many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Hyperarousal refers to the constant expectation of danger, intrusion reflects the permanent imprint of trauma, and constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender. Herman suggests that, “The fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (p.3). Survivors of trauma are often on what Judith Herman calls a “survivor mission” (p.207). Confrontation with the spiritual, philosophical, existential, and/or religious themes of human existence are necessary for a full recovery of a person.

According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), the traumatic events shatter our fundamental assumptions about benevolence and meaningfulness of the world and of our self-worth. In this way, these traumatic events leave a psychological imprint and make permanent changes in the psychological world of traumatized people. Janoff-Bulman proposes that human beings, from their very beginnings, by having a “good-enough” caregiver, develop

fundamental beliefs about benevolence, meaningfulness, and self-worth. Even though these beliefs are positively biased illusions, they are proved to be very resistant to change. People use different strategies to maintain these beliefs and positive feelings associated with them. These beliefs change gradually as people mature to accommodate lived experiences, however, when tragedy strikes, these beliefs get shattered and the dramatic change often cannot be easily accommodated and understood. The key in the process of coping with trauma is to understand that our basic assumptions are shattered and we need to rebuild them. This process is done at first by automatic coping where two contradictory processes alternate. Those are denial and emotional numbing and intrusions and re-experiencing of the trauma. The effort to reinterpret new data follows, and the interactions with others also play a crucial role in this process. If the person recovers, that means that her new assumptions reflect the acknowledgment of misfortune and awareness of vulnerability. There is an awareness that tragedy can strike at any time, however, the new assumption that people build in the aftermath of trauma are not entirely negative. People remember what happened to them but try not letting that entirely define them. When people successfully integrate negative events into their lives, they possess “a new, special sort of wisdom” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p.175) that allows them to be more aware of their everyday existence.

All of these trauma theorists acknowledge that trauma can also have longitudinal consequences other than the onset of psychological disorders. McFarlane and Yehuda (1996) say, “Traumatic experiences can become powerful sources of motivation for some individuals” (p.164). Janoff-Bulman points out that “it is not unusual for survivors to reevaluate their traumatic experience over time and to see the traumatic event as a

powerful teacher of life's most important lesson" (p.133). van der Kolk suggests that in any consideration of the long-term outcome the range of posttraumatic outcomes needs to be kept in mind. van der Kolk & McFarlane (1996) also say,

However, beneath the tidiness of emotional distancing and scientific classification lie the human vitality and energy to struggle against, and to create meaning out of, what appears to be the random cruelty of fate. This struggle to transcend the effects of trauma is among the noblest aspects of human history (p.574).

With these words in mind, I turn now to the concept of posttraumatic growth.

Posttraumatic growth

The great interest in studying positive changes following traumatic events is part of the greater general movement towards positive psychology. These positive changes have been defined in the literature with different terms; for example, positive psychological changes, perceived benefits, stress-related growth, flourishing, discovery of meaning, positive emotion, and thriving (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tedeschi and Calhoun coined the term Posttraumatic Growth in 1996 when they developed an inventory designed to measure such growth. Since that time, it seems that researchers have widely accepted this term if we are to judge by the number of studies on this matter published in the last decade. However, as the authors note, the term might be new, but the experience of psychological change that they are referring to have been known for thousands of years.

According to these authors, "posttraumatic growth is the experience of positive psychological change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p.1). There is a wealth of empirical evidence for existence of this phenomenon. The majority of this evidence is quantitative. Proffitt, Cann, Calhoun and Tedeschi (2007) investigated how 30 Judeo-Christian clergy dealt with

personal crisis and what factors are related to psychological well-being and the possibility of psychological growth. A moderate amount of growth was found among participants and a relatively high amount of well-being. Clergy used both, positive and negative religious coping strategies that promoted growth. However, it was found that as clergy has a complex social role in North America, they felt social constraint to reveal their own struggles with meaning and relations with God. Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi, and Calhoun (2003) examined levels of PTG with PTGI among 136 former refugees and displaced people in Sarajevo, and found low to moderate levels of PTG depending on the age of the participants. Authors believe that the lower than other studies scores can not be attributed only to cultural differences existing before the war, but the fact that participants' micro and macrosystems have been changed or destroyed. Particularly, the 46-65 year old group showed low levels of perceived growth in this study. Ai et al. (2007) used a convenience sample of 50 Kosovar refugees in Washington state. This was a 10-month follow-up study in which participants were asked to fill out the survey packages. The initial survey assessed demographics, war-related trauma, PTSD symptoms and hope. After participants returned the first set of questionnaires they were sent a 10-dollar payment. 10 months after, the follow up included assessment of coping strategies, PTSD symptoms and PTG. The findings indicate the coexistence of both PTG and PTSD symptoms, and stress the importance of hope and cognitive coping for this sample.

In a study with cardiovascular disease patients (Sheikh & Marrota, 2005), 124 individuals, recruited through medical professionals, were administered the PTGI questionnaire. The factor structure in this study did not support the original structure;

however, participants reported PTG, and particularly high score were reported on the appreciation of life scale. Morris, Shakespeare-Finch, Rieck, and Newbery (2005) examined the multidimensionality of PTG in Australian undergraduate student population. Moderate levels of PTG were found in a predominantly female sample (183 female and 30 males). Of all factors, the smallest amount of growth was found in spiritual growth domain, and this seems to be the finding in studies done in countries other than the USA. Maercker and Herrle (2003) investigated the aftereffects of the Dresden bombing in 1945. They found low levels of PTSD and higher levels of personal growth, which was mainly associated with the participants' internal as opposed to external control.

In what seems to be the first study that used neuroscience methods to explore relations between brain function and experiences of PTG with 82 participants who survived a severe motor vehicle accident, Rabe, Maercker, Zollner, and Karl (2006), demonstrated that relative left frontal cortical activation is associated with greater perceived PTG that participants reported on the self-report PTGI measure. Interestingly, the data in this study indicated that the different PTG domains were differentially related to anterior asymmetry. Notably, the domain of spiritual change was not associated with anterior asymmetry. The authors are hoping that this type of research might help clarify the underlying mechanisms that support posttraumatic growth. The first study of PTG in people with acquired brain injury (McGrath & Linley, 2005) was done with 2 small convenience samples of 10 and 11 participants respectively. One sample was studied early in the recovery process (early sample) and the other at least 1 year after their in-patient rehabilitation (late sample). Both samples showed significant PTG, especially the

so-called “late” sample. This study indicates that the PTGI is appropriate for use with a brain injury population. Ho, Chan, and Ho (2004) investigated PTG among Chinese cancer survivors. The translated PTGI was administered to 188 participants, and it was found that they reported growth but the confirmatory factor analysis showed structurally different PTG among Chinese patients.

A few studies that used qualitative research methods found also evidence of posttraumatic growth. A study by Salick and Auerbach (2006) looked at people’s subjective experiences to investigate the psychological process of adjustment and personal growth from trauma to recovery in 10 participants with visible impairment from chronic illness or serious injury. From the interviews, the authors developed a stage model of trauma and recovery. They suggested the following stages in their model: apprehension, diagnosis and devastation, choosing to go on, building a way to live, and integration of the trauma and expansion of the self. Shakespeare-Finch and Copping (2006) used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data and tried to understand cultural differences in posttraumatic growth. They found some similarities between their Australian undergraduate sample and US research findings and also some differences, specifically in the areas of spirituality, religiosity, and compassion. The Australian sample displayed a more expansive compassion dimension and an absence of the spirituality/ religiosity dimension in comparison to US research findings, which supports the perspective that there are cultural differences in the way people experience PTG in different cultures.

Tedeschi and Calhoun’s theory of PTG developed from Janoff-Bulman’s theory of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to these authors, PTG is experienced

when rebuilt cognitive schemas account for new and changed reality in the aftermath of trauma. These new cognitive schemas are more resistant in the face of future traumatic events. Social support and disclosure are thought to contribute significantly in this process. They also propose that there are certain personal characteristics (i.e., extroversion and openness to experience) that predispose some people to PTG. The process of PTG has emotional and cognitive components that are both important for learning and eventual change. There are several ways in which PTG can manifest itself; however, different people might perceive growth in different ways. In general, people report that they perceive positive change in self, a change in interpersonal relationships, and their philosophy of life (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

Meaning making

Meaning is essential to pursuing a goal-directed and purposeful life (Frankl, 1992). Meaning making is a psychological process that illuminates how people make sense of severely disturbing and potentially harmful events that happen to them. It is a “fundamental human process that takes on special significance at times of crises and life disruption” (Collie & Long, 2005, p. 851).

When traumatic events happen, such as war, exile, and resettlement, these events can severely threaten peoples’ meanings in life. In this context, people have to confront many issues at the same time, and this can be overwhelming. When people are not able to successfully integrate disturbing events, they are likely to experience emotional distress and difficulties with adaptation (Skaggs& Barron, 2006). Therefore, it seems important to understand how people integrate these events to become a part of their past life experiences.

In the literature on refugees and meaning, it has been stressed that it can be challenging and difficult to find meaning in these multiple losses. In her analysis, Alcock (2003) talks about the meaning of loss of home, culture, family, and status in the life of the refugees. Alcock calls this an assault on meaning and says that,

Powerful internal defenses against intolerable loss and inner pain are mobilized to help people survive... This price of survival can exacerbate loss of inner meaning and feelings of depletion and emptiness... When home is lost, it is lost forever, and even if we do return, both home and ourselves have changed. We can never go back; we can never recover the past. Perhaps it is only when this reality is faced that we can begin again to live in the present, starting, not from the beginning, but from the fault line that disjointed our lives (p. 292).

Huttunen (2005) examines the meanings of home in the lives of Bosnian refugees living in Finland after the devastating war in Bosnia. Huttunen portrays people from Bosnia who remember Bosnia as a good home before the war but are uncertain about the future. Bosnians struggle to negotiate the possibilities of new homes in diaspora by trying to salvage the damage done to themselves and their way of living. After the home (as a private and public space) has been destroyed, it is difficult to find a new place that one can call home.

Researchers have conceptualized meaning in the context of living through negative life events in a number of different ways (Park & Folkman, 1997). Park and Folkman (1997) distinguish two types of meaning: global and situational meaning. Global meaning refers to people's enduring beliefs and valued goals. Situational meaning refers to the interaction between person's global meaning and the specific event in person's life.

In their conceptual analysis of searching for meaning in significant negative events, Skaggs and Barron (2006), define meaning based on the conceptualization from Park and Folkman (1997). They also distinguish two types of meaning: global and situational. Global meaning is defined as a person's basic goals and fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about the world. Situational meaning is defined as a person's interpretation of an event that is important and has an impact on person's values, beliefs, commitments and sense of order in life (Skaggs & Barron). Situational meaning is considered to consist of three components: appraisal of the situation, search for meaning, and meaning as outcome. According to Skaggs and Barron, four critical attributes of searching for meaning are: searching for meaning is a process, it is

temporal, it is unique for each individual, and it is recursive. It seems that people, as they search for meaning, may use the following methods: “reattributions, creating illusion, positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping, and revaluing ordinary events” (Skaggs & Barron, 2006, p. 567). The consequence of the process of searching for meaning can be positive or negative. Positive consequences appear when the situational meaning is congruent with global meaning, and a person may emerge from this process with a sense of personal growth characterized by a new outlook on life, new priorities, goals, and a deeper appreciation of life. The purpose of the main research question of this study was to look at this psychological process of meaning making to try to illuminate how people make sense of lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement and potentially experience personal growth as outcome.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main intention of this study was to explore the stories people from the former Yugoslavia construct about their experiences of war, exile, and resettlement to better understand the meaning making process and positive changes that might occur in the aftermath of living through severely traumatic events. The main research question that guided this study was “ How do people from the former Yugoslavia describe their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement?”

The qualitative research paradigm

In order to adequately explore the depth and complexity of human experience, methodological diversity is desirable (Morrow, 2007). Qualitative research is the most useful approach to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences and it is the best approach for examining processes. Also, if a researched process or phenomenon is not well known or understood, this methodology may help discover new or unexpected knowledge (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research design fits well with research questions that ask “How” or “What” (Creswell, 2003).

A qualitative investigation appeared to be the most useful approach to understanding the process of meaning making and understanding positive changes in the aftermath of trauma. By using in-depth interviewing, I was able to gather rich data about participants’ life experiences in a way that it would not be possible by quantitative strategies. Related to this study, “...little is known about the processes, concomitants, and consequences of posttraumatic growth” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p.3), and also little is known about how refugees make meaning and transcend accumulated traumatic events.

Therefore, my research interest and question lent itself well to qualitative research methods, particularly narrative inquiry, where the aim is to create interpreted description of the rich and multi-layered meanings of historical and personal events (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003).

The narrative research design

Narrative research, according to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, (1998), refers to research that uses or analyzes narrative data that can be collected in an interview or in some other means. The assumption of this approach is that there is “no absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of the text” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.2). In addition to this, stories that people tell are subjective and allow for expression of individuality, and freedom of selection, while constructed around a real historic event (Lieblich et al., 1998). The narrative research design seems particularly suitable for a study that deals with the personal construction of past experiences and for research questions that ask about life experiences of an individual and how they unfold over time (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007).

Narrative analysis may help us better understand the varied ways in which events are perceived and experienced. Neimeyer (2004) says, “The human penchant for meaning making through the medium of storytelling is obvious” (p.53). Further, the narrative method is especially well suited to capture the growth themes within the narrative accounts of traumatic events themselves (Pals & McAdams, 2004). Riessman (2008) says, “Telling stories about difficult times in our lives creates order and contains emotions, allowing a search for meaning and enabling connection with others” (p.10). To be understood, these private constructions of identity must mesh with a community of life

stories, or “deep structures” about the nature of life itself in a particular culture (Reissman). It could capture the searching and transforming process contained within the narratives these people made for others and themselves. The narratives within which we live are not only ways of telling about our lives, they are also the means by which we establish order and organize our experience so we can understand it and make meanings of events and experiences that can seem otherwise meaningless (Reissman). Ultimately, we make meaning, create order and social connections by creating, exploring, and telling our stories (Gilbert, 2002).

The researcher's reflexivity

As I am a former refugee, a Bosnian Serb from Sarajevo, and as I shared and reflected on my own experiences, my personal lived experience of war, exile, and resettlement guided this study in many aspects, from research interest and defining the research question, conducting the interviews, analyzing and interpreting the data, and writing the final document. In narrative research, the researcher listens, interprets and reports on stories she collects from participants. The researcher own experiences undoubtedly influence the way she does these tasks. Therefore, being aware of the ways in which I might have influenced the interpretations and results of the study was essential.

I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and reactions throughout this researcher process. It was essential to stay open to different perspectives and values of participants who might have lived through similar experiences; however, might have different perceptions and views than my own. In this study, my own and participants' ethnicity was a sensitive issue due to the nature of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. I strove to be open to

stories from all participants, regardless of their own ethnic background, even though these might not entirely have matched my views and experiences on what happened in the war in the former Yugoslavia. It helped that I kept the research journal and self-reflective memos in order to be aware of the ways in which my own life experience, my assumptions and expectations shaped the research process. I included participants' stories in this document so that reader can evaluate validity and integrity of my conclusions from these stories. Lastly, I thought that both my participants and I felt special closeness and connection between us as we shared the same country in the past, witnessed its destruction, and have struggled to make meaningful life anew in Canada. I thought that this allowed my participants to share their stories with me in a trusted and open manner. Throughout this research endeavor, my experience and training in counselling helped me in maintaining a high professional standard in this undertaking.

Data collection

Participants

As the focus of this study was to explore the individual lived experiences of people from the former Yugoslavia who lived through the war, exile, and resettlement, participants were adults who came to live to Canada because they had to leave their homes in the former Yugoslavia due to the latest war that lasted from 1991-1995. To better understand processes related to meaning making and positive changes, I collected data from people who were adults when the war started.

The needed sample size in a narrative study is inversely proportional to the intensiveness of the study. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) recommend for most

interview-based projects anywhere between 5 and 30 interviews. Relatively few deep and long interviews yield as much material as many shorter, less intensive interviews.

To recruit participants for this study, I used the purposeful sampling procedure. This procedure is used when only particular people have information that is important for the study. The selection criteria were: a) participants were former refugees from the former Yugoslavia and b) participants were young adults or adults when the war started. I advertised this study, for recruitment purposes, in the Serbian Cultural Centre and Croatian Cultural Centre, and I used word-of-mouth strategies that included personal contacts to pass information on to potential participants. All my participants were recruited through personal contacts. Participants also helped me to recruit, as they passed the information about the study onto their friends.

The topic of this research seemed to elicit certain types of responses from people. Some people from the former Yugoslavia were suspicious about the intentions of this study and wondered why I was doing this. They wondered if I was somehow ordered or tricked into doing this. Why would I do something like this? Whose interests do I present? Especially men were suspicious. Some people believed that their stories could be tracked somehow, uncover their real identities and cause them harm in the end. One man's comment was "You know everybody says that everything is anonymous, but nothing is anonymous. If you want to find out something, you eventually will."

Also, people were genuinely concerned that I might not be able to find participants. My first participant told me, "You will have trouble finding people to talk about this topic." Then I heard, "Nobody wants to talk about this." One man even asked me, "Why do you want to talk about that for Goodness' sake?" It is difficult to talk about

something you have been trying to forget. However, once people started to talk about it, they seemed they didn't want to stop. All but one interview lasted almost 3 hours. I was the one who quit first, because I was exhausted from listening. All interviews were done in these people's homes where they made me feel very welcome. They opened their homes for me; they offered me food and drinks, and were very warm and friendly.

I interviewed 2 men and 3 women. The ages of these participants ranged from 36 to 53 years. They have been in Canada from 10 to 14 years. All participants but one woman had university education. All participants became upset while telling their stories. Three participants cried throughout the interview, and a person who was in combat had the most difficult time getting through the story. At the same time, he wanted to go back and tell more. He said to me, "I want to tell you about people who died for nothing, about people who were crooks, about terrible people and good people." When he became upset and overwhelmed, I stopped the interview to give him time to recuperate. This was a hard interview for me too. At one point, I questioned why I was doing all of this, for what purpose. Three participants were obviously distressed throughout the interview and I was distressed as well.

I debriefed with all of my participants at the end of the interviews. I talked to them about available free counselling and explained how and why that might be helpful for them. They seemed to be somewhat uncomfortable with this suggestion and said to me that they did not need that. In any event, I gave them a list with free counselling options that they would be able to use if they decided to do that. Additionally, I also asked for the permission to phone them again within the next few days to make sure they were feeling well. I got a confirmative response from all of them, but all of them

reassured me that there was no need for that. I was concerned about them, however, at the same time, I did not want to bother them too much. In the end, I did phone two of my participants, Boriša and Zdravka, as I was quite concerned about them. Boriša told me that he was exhausted after the interview, but he reassured me at the time of my phone call that he felt well. Zdravka sounded well on the phone and said that she was doing well. I contacted the others via email and ensured that they were at least as well as before the interview. Also, participants expressed their care for me at the end and empathized that it must have been hard for me to do these interviews. I was very touched by their care.

Because of the nature of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, my ethnicity was important from the beginning. I thought that I might have trouble recruiting Muslims from the former Yugoslavia. Three participants were ethnically Serbs, and two had a mixed ethnic background. One man, a Bosnian Muslim, at first agreed to be interviewed, however, he gave up in the process. He had all the information about the research and he contacted me. However, when I phoned him to confirm, his wife responded and I realized that she was not aware that he would participate in something like this. My instinct told me right away that this would not go well. However, as he didn't phone me to cancel, I drove to our agreed location for an interview. When he showed up, he told me that he needed to talk to me before we started, and he said that he would not be willing to give me an interview after all. He said that he didn't want to talk to me against Milošević now that he's settling in the new area and has neighbors. He didn't want some people to know how he feels about the subject. I realized that he thought that to put his name on the informed consent form was too dangerous. He talked to me off record for

about 20 minutes and he said some things, mainly accusations and his thoughts about Serbs. I really didn't have anything to say to him. I was disappointed that he was not able to give me an interview, and I felt offended personally with some things he said, however, I said that if he felt disturbed and upset in any way because of thinking about this interview, there was help available for him at UBC and New West clinic. He rejected this outrightly. I understood him though. I understood that he also didn't want to offend me or hurt me in any way. Losses are enormous and the pain is huge, and he blames Serbs for that. I just wondered why he had an urge to say these things to me, when he already had said that he could not do the interview. We parted nicely, shook our hands and left. I did my journal after, and wrote down what was said in those 20 minutes. I was then in a better position to interview the next person and I felt better prepared to interview someone who might say things that would be very difficult for me to hear.

Procedure

Respondents were given details about the study before they agreed to participate. A time and place for the interview, convenient to participants, was arranged. Details on informed consent, confidentiality, the potential harm, and the right of participant to terminate participation at any time, if desired, were discussed. I had a form for each participant that outlined the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the steps I undertook to protect the confidentiality of the data. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' anonymity. A consent form was signed before the interview started, and I also provided a list of counselling referrals for all participants.

Interviews were the main means for collecting data. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) note that narrative study is impossible without detailed stories that reveal the way in which people view and understand their lives. I used the conversational style of interviewing as it was a less intrusive approach and reduced potential tensions between my participants and me. I used open-ended, broad questions to let participants tell me their stories in their own way. The preliminary question was “ Could you tell me your story from the first time you realized that the war was really happening?” I used probes when necessary, and asked for some clarifications. At the end of the interview, I asked the well-being question “ Where do you find yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 as far as your well-being is concerned?”

All but one interview lasted almost 3 hours. All interviews were audio-taped and all interviews were done in Serbo-Croatian. All participants had a choice between English and Serbo-Croatian but chose their mother language. I kept a memo on each participant by writing down my thoughts, observations, impressions, and feelings towards the interviewee and the interview process, and any questions that came to mind. After participants ended their story, I asked them to respond to a short questionnaire by indicating the true responses for them. The Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, Alvarez, 1979) has been widely used in clinical practice and research for over 20 years (Sundin & Horowitz, 2000). The questions on this questionnaire ask people about the presence and frequency of experiencing certain difficulties people commonly report after trauma. I translated this scale into Serbo-Croatian, two participants answered this translated questionnaire and three participants answered the IES form in English, as they

were comfortable with English language. At the end of the interview, I debriefed with each participant.

For the second part of the study, I contacted participants via email. I sent them their narratives in order to solicit their feedback regarding the accurate presentation of their stories' content and to give them an opportunity to add something or to voice if they wish for something to be omitted from their narratives. None of the participants made any changes to their stories.

Data analysis

The primary task of the analytic process is to understand the meanings inherent in the data and to render them in the form consistent with the research question (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). The researcher who wants to produce a convincing interpretation of qualitative evidence, that would be different from what a lay person would arrive to, needs to use some heuristic devices that enable her to go beyond what is obvious.

I started data analysis with detailed transcription of the material, and as I approached the interview as a co-constructed undertaking where the interviewer is an active player in the construction of the narrative, my own verbal and non-verbal reactions were included. This was done to highlight that the words were not spoken in a vacuum but in the conversation with the interviewer. As all interviews were done in Serbo-Croatian, participants' mother language, I transcribed and analyzed the data in Serbo-Croatian, as this is my first language as well. I translated almost all data myself in English. A professional translator translated only 10 pages of my first interview. I did this as a check for the quality of my own translation as I wanted to see if this person, who had been a translator for the past 20 years, would translate the interview much differently

from me. I was pleased with his work, and also confident that I could do a very good job with translation myself. By doing the transcription and translation of the interview data myself, I got to know the data really well.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, describe different possibilities for reading, interpreting, and analyzing narrative data. Two main approaches are: holistic versus categorical and content versus form. Holistic versus categorical approach refers to the unit of the analysis (i.e. sentence or narrative as a whole). When a categorical perspective is used, a researcher is usually interested in a problem or a phenomenon shared by a group, while the holistic perspective is used when the interest is a person as a whole and her/his development to the present situation (Lieblich et al.). The content approach is interested in explicit and/or implicit content, while the form approach looks at the structure of the plot, the sequencing of the event, the style of the narrative, metaphors and other form techniques.

The categorical content perspective is very similar to content analysis, which is a classical method for analyzing narrative material in psychology. This method has many variations, and I will be following the framework described by Lieblich et al., 1998. Within this general framework, I discovered my themes by engaging in the following procedure:

- 1) After reading the transcriptions numerous times,
 - a) I wrote up narratives using first-person accounts
 - b) I sent narrative accounts back to participants for an editing and accuracy check as part of the “participant check” procedures (see p. 47 on Validity)

- 2) In the final narrative accounts, I highlighted all the sections of the text that pertain to my main research questions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call these sections of the text the units of information, which serve as the basis for defining categories. A unit has two characteristics. It should be heuristic and it has to be the smallest piece of information that can stand on its own. This might be a sentence or a paragraph. When I located the unit, I copied and pasted it in a separate word file. In this stage of work, I erred on a side of overinclusion.
- 3) I defined the content categories through a circular procedure of an open and careful reading of the text, suggesting categories, and sorting highlighted sections into categories. According to Lincoln and Guba (1995), the essential task of categorizing is to bring together units that seem to relate to the same content and this can be done in the following way:
 - a) The first highlighted section in the text represented the first yet-to-be-named category. Then I looked at more highlighted sections to decide if its' content was similar to the first one. If not, that next highlighted section represented the second yet-to-be-named category. All highlighted sections were sorted in this way.
 - b) When each category accumulated enough data (6 to 8 highlighted sections), I started delineating category properties and devising the rule for inclusion. After this, I named the category so that name captures the essence of the rule for inclusion.
 - c) Further sections were included based on the rule for inclusion for each category.

d) I reviewed the categories for overlap in order to minimize ambiguities.

For example, cultural shock and feeling discrimination had some overlap and I needed to look more closely at these two categories.

e) I drew conclusions from the final results by describing the contents found in main categories to create main themes.

Validation of findings

The concept of validity in qualitative research refers to the credibility or correctness of description, explanation and/or interpretation (Maxwell, 1996). To ensure the validity of findings in this research study I insured the following steps:

- I audiotaped interviews and I checked transcription against the audiotapes for accuracy
- I checked my translation several times to insure the quality and accuracy of my translation
- I kept notes and self reflective journal to keep my biases in check
- I solicited feedback from peer reviewers, my committee members and one expert in the field. The aim was to find out if my findings resonate with them and if they saw congruency between narratives and the main themes.
- I solicited feedback from the participants (“participant check”) of this study to assure that my subjectivity does not dominate and that participants’ perspectives are fairly represented. I sent participants their own story for editing and an accuracy check.
- I used the “rich” data (Maxwell, 1996) to test my conclusions and to make the data visible to the reader

Ethical concerns in narrative research

Ethical concerns are always at the forefront of any research including human beings. In studies like the one I did, it was especially important to be clear about the purpose of the interviews. That said, it was crucial that potential participants understood that they were about to engage in a research interview that does not have any intended therapeutic purpose.

Narrative research consists of obtaining and then reflecting upon participants' lived experience, and it is inherently a relational endeavor. Therefore, I, as a narrative researcher, had an ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives I study to contribute to scientific knowledge. I was committed to assuring the free consent of participation, guarding the confidentiality of the material, and protecting participants from any harm that may ensue from their participation in my research study (Josselson, 2007). I provided participants with a list of counsellors who would be available for help if any discomfort or distress arises as a result of their participation in this study. As I study real lives of real people where there can be an indefinite number of possibilities, I cannot be absolutely certain of the potential impact of the interview. However, I deeply believe that the benefit that arises from the holistic approach to researching people in context outweighs the highly unlikely possibility that someone might severely get distressed as a result of participation in a narrative study (Clandinin, 2007).

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVES

Nikola

It was Bayram, April 6, 1992. It was about 6, perhaps 7, am. The Muslims were celebrating. It was a big celebration, with a burst of automatic fire that lasted about five minutes. I didn't get scared, but I realized that there was no way a war could be avoided. This burst of automatic fire on that Bayram morning was a sign for me that it was time to leave town. I had already seen – especially on my visits to relatives in the country – that all three sides had armed themselves and were waiting. They were all nice to each other – neighbours, friends, ordinary folks – but everyone had a weapon and was ready to fight – and they knew who against. I had no illusions whatsoever, and, being a bit of a coward by nature, my first thought was to get out of there. I did not want to fight at all, and I especially did not want to fight against Serbs. People were prepared for war on all sides, and I was fortunate to have realized that. I felt sorry for the people who had gathered in front of the Assembly building, and I found it strange that people did not realize what was happening. Weren't they watching TV? But then again, I was in contact with rural people in different parts of Bosnia, and I had talked to students from my University who had come from many different places. I clearly saw that they were all thinking in the same way, but everyone was doing it within their own ethnic group. Some were ready to defend Bosnia's independence once it became independent, while the Serbs were ready to defend their right to remain in Yugoslavia. I clearly saw that, as a Serb, I had no business being in that town. I did not consider Alija [Izetbegović] as my president, and I did not want to fight against my own people, which I would have had to do had I stayed in town. I don't hate anyone. I had never hated anyone, but it would have been my biggest defeat if

I'd taken up arms and if I'd had to fight against my own people. Again, I did not want to go to war at all because I was afraid of getting killed or wounded, and I only wanted to get out of there. And if they were to repatriate me from Serbia by force, they would send me to my own people, not to this town.

My father, whom I regard as a rational man, did not believe that war would come to our town. He believed there would be a few skirmishes, a few weeks of scuffling, and that people would then sit down and talk. He thought that no one was crazy enough to get killed and destroy everything that it had taken years to build. He once even told me that I should stay, and if my Muslim neighbour was to get killed, I, his son, should get killed as well. I completely disagreed with this. However, one day he came home from work pale as death. He told us that a 15-year-old with an automatic rifle had stopped him in the street, pushed him against the wall, checked his ID and roughed him up a bit. This really upset him, and he realized that things were different and more serious than he had thought. He then said it wouldn't be a bad idea for my sister and me to find shelter in Serbia for a few weeks until this blew over.

The army was evacuating people regardless of their ethnicity, and my sister managed to leave first. My turn came up a day later. I called my Serbian friends. I did not call any others because I did not know how they would feel about it if I told them I was leaving. They all took note of this information, but no one left at the time. They were all waiting because, just like my father, they believed that everything would settle down after some minor fighting. I had that instinct (a friend of mine calls it an "insect") that was simply telling me to leave that place. At the time, I had to use crutches because I had injured my knee playing soccer, and because of the crutches it was relatively easy

for me to move across town, accompanied by my mom. I remember how people felt completely lost. I got on a streetcar to get out of town, some were going to work, others were going to the farmers' market, while some people were ditching the place, just as I was. People were unaware of what was going on. One could see all kinds of armies, and shots were heard in places. But it was still early at the time. We did not know who was holding which positions, and no one dared to try and control the movement of citizens, so that no one touched me. I met soldiers from different armies, first the Muslims and then the Serbs, and they all let me through because I had crutches. However, I did not succeed in getting out that same day. The crowd at the airport was enormous, so that we spent the night in some woman's house, where one of my relatives had been a lodger a long time ago. In addition to my mother and me, two more families with little children spent the night there.

I felt a little ashamed for boarding the plane with those crutches. Everybody let me pass, believing I had been wounded. The Antonov plane was so full of people that it had much difficulty getting off the ground. I thought we might hit one of the buildings close to the airport. After we took off, I looked at the town below and felt incredible relief. I felt so glad I was leaving that town, the town in which I had grown up and where I had attended school. I did not believe I would get out so easily. Unbelievable. That's one of my life's successes, although I never mention it in interviews as a reply to the question "what are you proud of?"

When I came to my uncle's place in Serbia, a load had been taken off my mind. I had managed to escape, and now I was following the news to see what was happening. Most of the things I took with me were books because my father advised me to keep

studying and not get too relaxed until this whole thing had blown over. Thus I had more books than clothes with me. My uncle's apartment was small, and I shared a room with a male relative, my sister shared another room with a female relative, while our uncle and aunt slept in the living room.

For the first few weeks, I was fascinated by this Serbian city, enjoying my streetcar rides. The situation was somewhat unusual. All of a sudden, I felt fine, without any obligations. More and more people, my friends, arrived daily, some finding accommodation in hotels, others with relatives. We began meeting downtown, recounting stories and situations and everything that was happening. This made it less traumatic for me because there were a thousand people sharing my fate. It was kind of unreal. All of a sudden, overnight, I found myself in another city. The weather was nice, and we went out every night, talking and sharing our everyday experiences. And we felt better for it – it was like therapy. I had a place to sleep and I wasn't hungry.

I then started thinking about what was going to happen to my mom and dad because we started receiving increasingly grim news about the killings and disappearances of Serbian civilians. The inner tension was rising. The Serbs in my town were undergoing an ordeal, just as members of the other ethnic groups were undergoing an ordeal in Serb-controlled territory. Until then I had done little thinking of my own. My father had it all figured out for me. Now I suddenly found myself in a situation where I had to figure out what I needed to do, and I had to be a parent to my sister and comfort her when she cried for our mom and dad. Things were made easier for us by the fact that Serbia gave us everything. There were no obstacles to my continued education. My friends and I enrolled in the local University to continue our education, while my

sister went to high school. This was basically a very good thing, as we had obligations to think about. Life went on. As registered refugees, we had medical insurance. I went to the dentist or doctor whenever I needed to, just as I would in my own country. I really did not have any problems in those two and a half years, but many others told me they were being discriminated against, and here too I have met people who hate that country because they went through all kinds of things there. I became a man during my refugee period, and for me the war was basically a positive thing. I became independent of my father, who is a great guy, but he controlled my life. I was fascinated by this metropolis, which gave me shelter. I met a whole bunch of people there. That's where I saw a transvestite for the first time in my life. The town where I lived before the war was a God-forsaken wasteland by comparison.

I must admit I felt ashamed and guilty a little that I was there safe, hanging around, having a good time while at the same time young men were fighting in Bosnia and Krajina; especially because I had close relatives in villages who had to fight. I would imagine often being confronted by the army police, somewhere on the street, who would send me back to Bosnia. I always imagined myself not resisting but accepting to go. I had all sorts of excuses for everybody around me and for myself for not being in the war. I was saying I had to be with my sister, I was allergic to pollen so I couldn't be in the woods, I had problems with my knee, my parents would get killed if somebody found out that I fought on the Serb side, and I was a true coward. My friends always laughed at my words, they openly said they would never go to fight in this war. I am extremely happy now that I didn't have to fight and I wasn't challenged in that way. Again, I had unbelievable luck.

We were able to talk to our parents during the first month, but then the lines were cut off. That was the hardest part – not knowing what was going to happen to our parents. My sister and I had been taken care of. A minor crisis broke out when we had to leave our uncle's place. My aunt just couldn't handle this any longer. She asked us if we had any other relatives to stay with. We spent three months at their place. They did not ask for a penny. We slept and ate there. I somehow managed to get in touch with my dad and told him we could no longer stay with this uncle, so my dad made arrangements for us to live with another relative. We were so incredibly lucky. His apartment was in the downtown core, and you could get anywhere on foot. My university was 10 minutes away, and my sister's high school three minutes away on foot. That was fantastic. This relative lived alone, and the apartment was very untidy, but we had complete freedom. We ate at the University cafeteria, and it cost us 3 Deutschmarks for a whole month. We had everything, including beer and cake. Sometimes we cooked at home. We had brought a couple of thousand Deutschmarks with us, and we also received aid as refugees. My sister registered at the new address, and I remained registered at the old address, so that we got double rations. True, this was a bit fraudulent, but we saved stuff and sent parcels to our parents. We sent about 15 parcels altogether, and our parents received them all. It meant a lot to them because they had nothing to eat or drink. A neighbour who arrived later told me how my mom had kissed the onions he had given her. It was really hard after the phone lines were cut off because we heard about bombs going off and killing large numbers of people, and we thought: "Oh my God, are they among the victims?" The hardest thing for me was when a bomb exploded at the farmers' market. I tuned into a radio station and listened to the list of the names of 150 people

killed in the attack. I was afraid I would hear their names – I would have died if I had – but fortunately, they were not among the casualties. They were alive.

I waited for all the convoys arriving from Bosnia because they brought me news. My mom always managed to find someone in those convoys to convey messages to us. Good people would bring letters, which were a month or two old, but at least I knew that their spirits were up, and that they were not totally destitute. My dad asked me if I was studying, and my mom joked, saying that my dad had been doing fieldwork so they had fresh fruit and vegetables, which meant he was digging trenches in the orchards. Our neighbours were gradually leaving town, so I was getting information about my parents. I heard that my father had also met with some misfortune. They beat him up, but that's just the way he is – he can't keep his mouth shut. In the end, he no longer wanted to go to the basement during the shelling raids because he found it a hassle, and as luck would have it, a tank shell hit the neighbour's apartment. Some neighbours then accused my dad of having signalled the gunners and guided the shell. They took him and another neighbour away that night, but that neighbour's son was some sort of officer in a Muslim brigade even though he was a Serb, so their captors were not sure about what to do with them. Be that as it may, they did not kill them. I just heard that my father had been beaten up so badly that there wasn't a single spot on his body that wasn't blue. These reports hit me really hard.

My father never wanted to leave the city while it was still possible. He did not want to be a refugee and “wear other people's underwear”, and he always said that no one had invited him anywhere. By the time he may have wanted to leave, it was already too late. My mom did not want to leave him. Otherwise, she would have left right away. It

seems that the knowledge that we were safe made things easier for them as they were able to focus on themselves and their own survival. The two of them seem to have experienced a renewed love during the war. My mom once said that they had not really known each other before and that they truly got to know each other only during the war.

It was only at the end of 1993 and in early 1994 that I learned that people were leaving for Canada. A friend of mine found out about it. I wasn't doing well at school. I just didn't see any point in finishing it. I then engaged in some petty smuggling, but that didn't work out either. I would buy chocolate and alcohol in Bulgaria and sell them in Serbia off street stands. I felt like a parasite, spending the money we had brought with us. I wasn't fighting in the war, and I was of little help to my sister – she had already found her own routine. Those of my friends who had left for Canada were thrilled about it. At the time, Canada seemed like a fantastic solution, an easy way out. I wasn't studying, I had no job, the situation was only getting worse, I had no possessions of any kind, and they still might have mobilized me for the war. So I decided to leave for Canada, one of the most affluent countries in the world, and to become a Canadian citizen. Suddenly a whole range of possibilities opened up in my one-dimensional world. I decided to stay in Canada for about 10 years and then return, build a house and start a business – the usual stuff – just like my compatriots did when they went to Germany to find employment there as temporary guest workers.

When I got my Canadian papers, my parents were afraid how my sister would cope on her own. My mom got some documents showing she could leave town for business purposes, and her bus took her across Serb-held territory. She managed to get off the bus halfway along the route and walked through some tunnel at the airport, and

that's how she managed to escape. I remember waiting for her to get off the bus after we hadn't seen each other for nearly three years. I saw a 90-year-old woman getting off the bus, and I thought that was my mother, prematurely aged. But then my mom showed up, looking the same, only thinner. It felt like we had said goodbyes only an hour earlier – such was the rush of energy because our mom was there. I just know that the three of us embraced each other and cried our hearts out for about two minutes. It wasn't that we were sad because we had to meet there, but tears just kept rolling down. That was the first time I saw her since she had smuggled me out of town as a disabled veteran. But nothing had changed between us. I had worried whether we would have anything to talk about or if she had changed physically or mentally, but when she got there, it felt as if there had been no war, as if nothing had happened. Time was relative, almost nonexistent. Thank God we were so lucky, so incredibly lucky, both those of us who were refugees and those who had survived after choosing to remain there. It was such incredible luck. I had considered myself lucky even before that, and I had never felt the need to bemoan my fate as a refugee. I simply knew how lucky we were. Unbelievable, unbelievable, thank God – that's all I can say. And I can't say I deserved it.

I didn't manage to get a visa right away – only on my third attempt, and then I had to wait longer because they found some suspicious shadow on my chest X-ray. All my friends had already arrived in a big Canadian city, while I was sent to a small town in eastern Canada. We were all from the same town, almost from the same neighbourhood. We had grown up together. My journey to Canada was also quite an experience. It was all new to me – the airplane and the small tomatoes they served during the flight in February. (I was used to seasonal food.) My first encounter with my destination was

what I saw from the airplane. I just saw frozen whiteness and fog everywhere. A delegation welcomed me at the airport, and brandy was sipped right away. They were Irish. They knew that anyone coming from the Balkans was bringing booze. The hospitality was unbelievable. I had arrived in a foreign country, but I felt that these people were friendly. I felt warmth coming from these Canadians.

The atmosphere was so strange. There were people from all ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia, mostly Serbs. The town was covered with snow. Immigrants were regarded as precious because everyone was trying to leave that island, and their goal was to keep as many people there as possible. The English language school was fantastic. Everyone was satisfied. So I decided to stay there for a while to study English because people told me that in Toronto and Vancouver they made you look for a job as soon as you learned a bit of English. That whole summer was phenomenal. We had snow until June, but when it melted, I realized that the town actually had sidewalks. Town life centered round a single street where all the bars and discos were located, and we went there every evening, just as we used to do in the old country. We liked this small-town atmosphere. Everyone was kind, no one locked their houses, and everybody greeted each other in the street. To me, that town seemed as if from a fairy tale. Up there, in the north of Atlantic Canada, people were amiable, and their houses were like from Disneyland, multicoloured, green, yellow and red. They used the paint left over from painting their boats to paint their houses with. Each of us rented our own apartment for cheap. We hung out as we did in the old country. Every evening there was a party at someone's place. We talked and sang. We also went out in the evenings. They had this happy hour

during which beer cost half a dollar for the first two hours. We went there because we had no money, and later we brewed our own beer.

People from the immigration department took us on outings. They also played tricks on us. They must have known where we had come from, so they played provocative movies for us, like Philadelphia, which is about homosexuals. We got up, turned the TV off and cursed them for playing that movie for us. That was ridiculous as we were University educated. It was a shock to me when I went to a store and saw people with Down syndrome working there. They call such people imbeciles back in the old country. In the old country we did our best not to look at them, but then I realized that we hid them from others, while here they tried to incorporate them into society, and this was a bit of a shock to me. Alcohol was another shock. I went to a store and bought root beer. It tasted horrible, and I gave it to some kids to drink. I was surprised by how conservative people were about alcohol. In the old country alcohol is sold on the same shelf with fruit juices. I was also dumbfounded by tabloids. I used to think that all newspapers were serious. One day on the beach I saw a newspaper headline saying that Nessie from Loch Ness had died, and I thought it was spectacular news that they had found Nessie in the first place. I was foolish enough to pay two dollars to read it. I did not know any better.

That's when I spoke to my dad for the first time since the war broke out. The whole town talked about how I ran up a 300-dollar telephone bill. But I did not care. I just wanted to hear my dad, and I also talked to my other family members. I just wanted to let them know where I was.

It was very traumatic for me when Krajina fell in August 1995, and when many of my relatives had to flee Krajina. The village in Krajina where I used to spend all my summer and winter holidays was burned down while I was still in Bosnia. All my relatives from that village had fled to another place. And now they had to flee that other place as well. My grandmother, born in 1910, had to flee on a tractor, for the umpteenth time. My whole world fell apart. It was a total meltdown. It really hit me hard to see the refugee convoys, especially as I had relatives and friends there. No one was helping those people, and then we heard reports of refugee convoys coming under shellfire. I think my whole world fell apart. I began to feel enormous tension. My friends told me I had changed. I believe that to be the source of my subsequent anxiety.

I then decided to leave the town I was staying in at the time and move to western Canada. Something was pulling me westwards – the ocean, the forests and reports of a booming economy. I arrived with friends in the Lower Mainland, and we rented an apartment there. That's when I had my first panic attack. I thought I was having a heart attack. I was doing some exercises, when I suddenly felt my heart pounding hard and unstoppably. I was unable to calm down, my heart was pounding, and then I started to sweat. My hands were sweating. I thought I was having a heart attack, and I began to panic and told my friends to call an ambulance. Firefighters and an ambulance came, and I calmed down a little bit – probably because of their presence. They told me that my blood pressure was a little above normal, but they did not find anything else that was suspicious and said they were not taking me to the hospital. I became quite withdrawn after that because I always expected this event to happen again. However, it did not happen until I moved into a new apartment. I lied down to sleep, and, all of a sudden,

my heart started pounding. I thought I was dying. I did not know what it was, and I called an ambulance. My roommate's behaviour really appalled me. When the ambulance came to take me away, he just turned around and went back to sleep. He later told me the same thing had happened to him before, but not any more. They took me to the hospital, did an ECG, but it turned up nothing. That is probably the only time I felt a little discriminated against in Canada – at the hands of the paramedics. One of the men that carried me on the stretcher asked me where I was from, and he did not seem ok with the fact that I lived there. He said there was a time when not everyone was allowed to live there. I thought I was dying, and he was giving me a hard time. It wasn't my fault that my rent was 650 dollars and that my welfare cheque allowed for that.

I had also a feeling that staff in the emergency were annoyed with me probably because they thought there was nothing wrong with me, and I was just wasting resources. They gave me a card to visit a cardiologist. However, this doctor closed yet another door for me. He only asked me if I had an ECG with me, and because I didn't, he said that the next time when I get this problem I should ask for an ECG. And that was it. Nobody understood me. I felt terribly alone. Simply, I did not have anyone else to turn to anymore. I went back to my apartment and got another attack that same night. My heart was pounding, and there was a deafening noise in my ears. There was nothing I could do, so I prayed to God. Somehow I managed to fall asleep, and I woke up in the morning feeling dead, basically just waiting for another attack to happen.

Sometimes I had several attacks daily; on any account, it was at least 3 to 4 attacks weekly. When I was not experiencing an attack, I was waiting for the next one to happen. All my friends noticed that something was off with me, however; I did not

confide in anyone, I was always saying that everything was just fine. But that is something unbelievable, that feeling, it is a primordial fear that you will go crazy, that you will die any moment, that you will disappear, that there is no way back. And then, all of this gets amplified with your negative thoughts and from the enormous exhaustion it comes to an end.

I have to admit that I had drunk quite a bit because of this. It was not that I was that drunk that I did not know for myself but for two years I was constantly somewhat intoxicated. Alcohol helped me to feel better and to relax. Automatically my spirit was up and after two beers I didn't think anymore about my situation. However, my drinking was significantly reduced when I got married. Also, I lost lot of weight, around 20 kg. I ate everything, all junk food that you can think of, but nothing, not a gram gain. First time I lost a lot of weight when I first fled my hometown in Bosnia, but I recovered from this, and now this dramatic weight loss again.

That was a living hell, that 1995 and 1996, it was the hardest and most difficult period in my life. I tried to be around people all the time, so if I dropped down, somebody would eventually call an ambulance. It was a disgrace to go see a psychiatrist, and the worst of all; I did not know what was wrong with me. In all that despair, I went to the library where I found a book about symptoms of psychological disorders. As I was reading through, I was relieved it wasn't schizophrenia. I could tell it was not depression either and then I came to anxiety disorders and panic attack. I felt tremendous relief that I found what was happening to me. I read it can be cured with medications or without, it is not known how it comes about, it could be due to loss of job, divorce, and some other traumatic experience. Let me get this straight, nobody diagnosed me ever officially, it

might be even posttraumatic stress disorder, but it does look like the panic attack. I focused on how it can be alleviated, confrontation with the fear, with what you are afraid the most. I was afraid that my heart would start pounding, so I was afraid to walk. I decided not to be the slave of my condition, so I started working on confronting my fear. I felt that I found what was happening to me, and I wanted to get rid of it. As I lived on the 10th floor of a big high-rise, I started climbing the stairs every day, so to see whether I would die, because what kind of life was that going to be if I had to avoid something and live constantly in fear. My heart was pounding, I sweat amply, but I wasn't dying. Then I would think to myself that if something was wrong with my heart I would have died by then. I also went to the pool every day where I swam 2 km, and perhaps I would have died if my heart had some sort of physical malfunction. That physical activity had a calming effect on me; I noticed I got relaxed after physical exhaustion.

Also, I found anxiety hotlines that helped. When I had an attack, I would lie down and phone the anxiety hotline. I would listen to it for hours; it had a calming effect on me. Even when you know what is happening with you, you tend to forget, and then you have to remind yourself. I have several friends who I believe have the same disorder, however, I think they haven't been lucky to get out of it successfully.

At the end of 1996, I started feeling better. I started taking courses and that helped. I noticed when I had some sort of responsibility and when I focused on something it helped me to feel better. I enrolled into an auto cad course as I had some technical drawing background. I worked on black market 8 hours weekly in one café so I could pay for the course, however, auto cad did not help me to find a job I wanted. After, I enrolled into a program for the CNC machinist. This was a 3-month full-time program; I

paid only 300 dollars as government subsidized it. Here I felt a real change for the better as far as my psychological health was concerned. I would get up at 7 am every morning, I had everyday responsibilities to study, prepare for exams, so I was very active and I would get tired and that felt good. I was one of the better students in this program and that contributed to my overall sense of feeling better. Thanks to this program, I got a job quickly as a CNC machine operator in a factory. It was shift work. I was still having attacks but I felt that they were subsiding. I suddenly started gaining weight, for 9 months I gained 20 kg. I made more money, and probably that helped me to feel better as well. I asked for vacation time, but my boss didn't allow me to go. Out of indignation, I quit. I simply had to go back to meet my father, mother, and sister.

When I first met my father, it was not as dramatic as with my mother, probably because we already had spoken on the phone. In any event, as soon as we got together as a family, we just went back to the old ways of relating, as if nothing had changed. My dad didn't want to talk about the war at all, not even what happened or who beat him. It seemed that he rationally explained to himself that the war is like that, and it was a good thing that he survived. I hope that he truly believes that and not only putting a brave face. He was still the same old dad who knows the best what needs to be done and who wants to control everybody else's lives. I was always upfront with him, however, I did not tell him right away about these panic attacks, but later I reproached him that it was maybe because of him and his control over me that I ended up with panic attacks. However, he still works in Bosnia. At first, he was laid off, but he complained to some sort of international justice body in Bosnia and then he was taken back. This is true luck for me,

as I don't have to send money to my parents, as most of our people have to send money to relatives.

I did not think about the city where I grew up as my city for at least 10 years. Somehow, it was as if I were angry at it, even though my parents still live there. I simply parted with it. Everything became ethnically divided, and this city did not belong to Serbs anymore, nor was it possible to live there together with others as we did before. Therefore, I had to say good-bye. We did not rejoice about the same things anymore; moreover it was dangerous to rejoice in certain things. I remember the soccer game Red Star vs. Bayern in 1991 when I cheered for Red Star [a soccer team from Yugoslavia] and everybody around me for Bayern [a German team]. Yugoslavian National team comes and everybody spit on it but I loved this team. Something had died and I saw that there was nothing for me there anymore. However, when I went back first time in 1999 I felt again something for this city, and especially in 2002. I drove from Serbia and when I came across river Drina, I embraced Bosnia. Bosnia, all green like a big park, those little paths, caws pastures, I just took it all in, and then the entrance to the town. I came through that same entrance thousands of times when I was coming back from my skiing trips. 2002 was better than 1999, I guess things calmed down after the war a bit more. Unfortunately, there are tremendous losses everywhere. It would be the best if we could all go back to where we where born and lived, but it can't be. And those people that are there now, they deserve to be there, everybody has to live and life goes on. In any case, it is a new era now. The town was different when we lived there, and it was different when the Turks or Austro-Hungarians were there, it is again a new era, different time.

Religion helped me to go through all of this. My father was a communist, and he did not allow my grandmother to baptize my sister. He was scared that if this were found out it would damage his career. He was very angry when she secretly baptized me. People massively went to church to get baptized during the war. I guess they were looking for some solace in this time of terrible suffering. You see all this suffering around you and ask yourself what is the point. When I fled Bosnia, I found a Bible in my uncle's house. I started reading it, and I couldn't stop. I was elated by it. There is nothing bad, nothing evil in it, I think it makes me a better man. The hardest for me was to divide, because I am a nationalist not a chauvinist (even though people say it is bad to be a nationalist), religious fate from ethnic nationality. Your religious fate is not your nationality, meaning love all people, so there is nothing bad in it; you have to work really hard to be a good Christian, not an easy task! I understand Christianity as something ultra clean, uncontaminated, and it helped me. It led me consciously and subconsciously to understand my situation and to understand that there is no need to moan and groan. Ultimately, I am very happy how things turn out to be for us. If we had to live through this, we had incredible luck, fantastic luck. I consider these years the best years of my life, those refugee years in Serbia. We only had our souls, we had our feelings, we talked to each other, very openly, there was no jealousy, and nobody had any material possession. It was such a lightness of being. The only thing that bugged me was that my parents were in this town and couldn't get out. I mean, nirvana, socialism, nobody had anything and everybody was happy, there was no reason to be jealous, my underwear was shabby and yours was a little shabbier.

When I arrived to Canada, I still felt that energy. Then, I felt unhappy that I was not as lucky as some of my friends and that was when I felt I became a little envious. We came together, everybody was at the same level, and then people started finding jobs, making money, and automatically they became busier, more money, less time for friends, then they started accumulated material things, and we drifted apart. We belonged to different classes now. It looked to me that as we gained materially we lost spiritually.

I became aware of another phenomenon. The time stopped for me in 1992. For example, music doesn't interest me at all. If there is something from 1989 or 1990, I know exactly who is the singer; I remember the music spot from TV because I lived a normal life up to that point. I watched TV, had friends, I knew TV shows, and TV personalities, the ones from our TV. Now I am completely indifferent. I don't have any interest in anything after 1992. Somehow the life broke down. Or I entered into the reality. A brutal reality hit me with the war, and I understood that all that music, TV, entertainment is artificial, that is not the life. I deeply felt life, a human life through communication with other refugees. You touch the bottom, and it is not the bottom, it is not the end of the world. I shared my destiny with thousands of other people; it would not be good if I were the only one. I have positive feelings from that time; unfortunately, I don't feel guilty for the war. Somehow I was always on the Serb side. I felt sorry for all civilians that suffered, of course, I will always be suspicious that things were as they are presented as we are the only guilty side. I will always doubt that, what can I do, I would love to get an absolute truth but who will say it when everything is so politicized and every story serves some interest. Simply, I cannot accept that we Serbs are so bad. Throughout history, we have always fought for justice; I cannot accept that we are all of a

sudden the villains. I remember I went to White Rock with a friend of mine, and a woman who overheard us talking asked where were we from. When I said Bosnian Serb she responded, "Say no more!" I understand her completely. Iran was a symbol of evil for me because that was how it was shown on TV, and then here in Canada, I was shocked when I got to know people from Iran. Great people! I was humble in front of their culture and humanity.

It hurts me. I think we don't deserve such a treatment. We, as a nation, suffered greatly, I mean, it is terrible 7,000 people in Srebrenica, of course it is terrible, but 300,000 people were forced to leave Croatia and nobody said a word, actually, it was said we deserved it. It hurts me, I am stupid because it hurts me but it does, and that is why I always say not only that I am a Serb but also that I am a Bosnian Serb. Nobody cares about this anymore; it is old news, however, when it comes to important questions for Serbia, which I consider my country, all these things are used as means to politically pressure Serbia. I couldn't care less for Milošević, but how come he is a devil, and Alija super, Tuđman great. They are not even mentioned. There were not only Serbs who committed the crimes. Everybody knows that, but people turn their heads the other way. It is very disappointing, what is the truth when everything serves some interest.

Despite everything, I see my life definitively on a positive side. My children are, thank God, hale and hearty. To be entirely happy, somebody would need to offer me a good job in Serbia and my wife would need to be happy about that. I would love for my kids to go to our school where they can learn in our language. I would love for them to have similar childhood as I had, with a lot of relatives and friends. I wish they could feel that different life, that closeness and friendships like we had in the old country. People

are more distanced here; I guess different system and different culture. When I came to Canada, I sought to make friendships only with my ethnic group. I did not have anything against anybody, but I knew that we could come into conflict easily. I could not talk against my own people, I knew how it would be, we would go back in time, Turkey period, 1918,1941 and I decided that I didn't need that as I didn't want a headache. However, in the end, I have friends and I made new friends who are both Muslims and Croats. We have an especially close relationship with one Muslim family who we got to know here. They understand me, I understand them, and somehow we coexist. We don't touch topics that are painful for them or for us. But they got homesick, just like I am, and they are going back, so my wife will lose her best friend. My wish to go back is ever-present and I doubt it will ever go away. That is a burden for my whole family. I don't have anything here; I am here only physically.

Dijana

It started with street barricades in April of 1992. We were not aware that the war would happen. My husband was ill. He had melanoma. At the time, my husband, Zoran, and I were renting an apartment. I worked in a bank and my husband worked in a car factory, and the agreement was that the companies we worked for would buy us a new apartment that year. So we had been buying furniture for our new apartment and we kept it in this rented flat. A woman who used to work with me at the bank had a house right across from where we lived. One day, she was standing on her balcony and showing some signs with her hands. At first, I could not quite understand what she was trying to say, but it was that we couldn't get to work that morning. She was saying that the streets were blocked and nobody could go anywhere. My husband and I decided to go to my

parents' apartment where my kids were already. My husband returned only once to get some of my clothes so I had something to wear to work, and that was all he took. We left there all our possessions and personal belongings and we never returned to this place again.

There was an order for everybody to go to work. My husband was already ill, but I had to go to work every day regardless of everything. There were no buses, so I had to walk from my parents' place about 2 km to get to the bank where I used to work. We would go home around 1 or 2 pm, depending on how hard the city was shelled that day. I walked the street side I thought was safer. I went to work until the middle of May, and then stopped because it was just too dangerous to go. I later learned that I was fired because I stopped coming to work. I found out about this when I was already outside the city and I asked my father to try and get my documents from the bank. This was when they told him that I was fired a long time ago. My husband also needed to go to chemotherapy but we couldn't get him to the other side of the city where the hospital was located. Then my father said to us that we had to leave until the situation in the city stabilizes a little bit. During the shelling raids we would go to the basement but somehow we still didn't believe that there would be a real war.

It was already June, when my cousin phoned me to let me know that the last convoy was organized for people to leave the city. The gathering place was in front of the radio television building, so she said that if we could come to that location we could join the convoy and leave the city. It was not possible to go anywhere on your own. You had to be part of a group. We decided to go, mainly because my husband was in a very difficult state. The irony was that my cousin didn't make it because that day there was a

heavy shelling in the part of the city where she lived. My parents' apartment was in a Muslim-Croat part of the city and this convoy had to go through the Serb-held territory in order to get out to Serbia or Croatia. All Serbs went to Serbia, and Croats and Muslims to Croatia. I had lots of relatives in Croatia because my father was a Croat. My husband was a Serb from Croatia, so we didn't really have anybody in Serbia. However, because my husband was a Serb we had to go to Serbia. My mother was a Serb from Bosnia. She was born in this city just like her mother was.

When we entered the Serb held part of the city the road was blocked behind us so we couldn't go back. I felt frightened. Even more frightening was when the soldiers put us to sleep in a gym and then the gym was locked. Children were crying and everything felt horrific. In the morning, the gym was opened and we were ordered to go to the car. We had to write the names and license plate number on the piece of paper and put it on a windshield. Then the convoy split, one part went to Serbia, one part went to Croatia. We had a problem; they were not letting Zoran go because of his age. He was 32. Then I found a friend who took Zoran to an army doctor who gave him permission to leave but only to another small Bosnian town. Then in that other town we had to see an army doctor again because they didn't trust the document we already had.

We went to Serbia and then that was horrifying. On my way to Serbia, I phoned my father to tell him that we couldn't make it to Croatia and that we were actually going to Serbia, and then my father phoned my husband's cousins who lived in a big Serbian city who agreed to give us a shelter. I had to place my husband in the hospital right away because of his condition. I would leave my two girls in front of the building to play and I would go to the hospital to Zoran every day. Then I would come back to the girls.

Whatever money I had I spent it all. The inflation was unbelievable. I would exchange in the morning 100 Deutsche marks and in the afternoon that would be nothing. My father sent me as much as he could. The way he did it was that he would give money to somebody in Bosnia and then somebody related to that person would give money to me in Serbia. However, once the telephone lines were cut off, I didn't have any connections with my parents anymore until radio amateur connection started to work after a few months.

I tried to find employment but with no success. Refugees, who came to Serbia earlier, in April, already found work but I tried everywhere and found nothing. I phoned my father and told him that I couldn't survive with my two children in this city and asked him to ask my aunt to take me in with my girls. My aunt was also a refugee from Bosnia but she had her vacation house in Serbia and I thought it would be easier for me to be with her. Her vacation home was a 2-3 hour drive from where we were. Her husband was taken into captivity in Bosnia and he was kept there for 2 years. My girls would stay with my aunt during the week, and I would go to be with Zoran in the hospital and then I would come for the weekends to see the children. The girls played outside all the time, but my aunt told me that when the plane flew over they would think they had to run to the basement.

A doctor, who was one of my father's students in Bosnia, worked at the hospital in Serbia. I talked to him about Zoran's condition and he told me there was no hope. The cancer already spread to lymph nodes. At the end of August, I took Zoran out of the hospital to bring him to my aunt's house, and he died at the beginning of September. He died on the first day of school. He was 32 years old. I went that weekend to the city to

try to get his refugee card, and when I got back he had already died. My aunt asked local people to give us a piece of land to bury him and we said to them that my father would pay them once the war was over. And they gave us a piece of land in this village so we buried my husband. My father paid for the land after a few years when he was able to get there.

One of my friends, who used to work with me in the bank in Bosnia, started baking and selling pies in Serbia so she asked me to help her. She had two sons who actually started this business. She would bake pies and they would sell it around the city. I was her assistant; I was preparing ingredients for pies while she made the dough. This lasted about three months and after that the young men went abroad. During these three months, I had the most terrible time. I stayed again with my husbands' cousins in the big city and these people had the strangest routine. They slept from 4pm to 8 pm every day, and then after they would wake up at 8 pm they would eat, watch TV, and be awake until 2-3 am. I worked from 7am to 3 pm and because I knew that they were sleeping from 4 to 8 pm I didn't want to disturb them so I walked around the city. I just walked the streets to kill that time, and then the most horrible was when I get to their place at 8 pm, they wanted to talk to me because they just got up, and I would hardly hold myself on my feet, because I would be completely exhausted. So I would have left this job anyway, as I didn't have anywhere else to stay but with these people.

Then a friend of mine called me to work in a bank close to where my aunt had a vacation home. I worked there for 6 months and then this collapsed as well. I couldn't find any other work, so I went with my aunt to pick apples, pears, or to dry plumbs during the nighttime. We needed any kind of work because we could not survive on our

refugee help. Nobody asked me if I had money to pay the school photos for the girls. My aunt did not even get the refugee help, because she had her vacation home there. But she was a genuine refugee; she fled her home in Bosnia. We didn't have food or money for the most basic things. This was an absolutely horrible time.

Even bigger problems started when my uncle came from Bosnia after 2 years of confinement there. He did not tolerate my kids and I to be with them. He thought we would stay forever. And true, there was no way back, nobody could go back to the city, and we didn't see the end of this war. Then I met my second husband, Milan. I had to get married; I didn't have any other choice. My second husband was a local man, a good man. He was divorced with one child, and this is where I encountered another problem. His first wife left him when she was pregnant, and she had never returned to him. When she heard that I was coming there with my kids, she went to Milan's home with their son. She had not been there in three years, and Milan's parents never saw their grandson, but she went now and said that she would like them to get together again. Milan told her that she could go back where she had been those previous three years. My troubles didn't stop there. Her brother threatened to kill me because he said I stole his sister's husband. I could not believe that all of this was happening to me. I was scared of her brother and I had to go to a police station to ask for protection. Police took away his gun afterwards. This was a different culture than what I was used to. I lived my whole life in a city, and this was completely different from anything I encountered in my pre-war life. I had to learn to drive a tractor, to do all sorts of different farm work. But what can you do? All these were tremendous changes in my life. At first, we agreed not to have any more

children, but later Milan changed his mind and we had a little girl. I already had two girls, and he had a boy who lived with his first wife.

I had a very difficult time in exile, because I didn't have any money, and I didn't have any way to make money. It was better when I got married. It was certainly better financially. I was able to buy books and school bus tickets for my kids. I knew that Milan would buy this for the kids; he was one of the wealthiest men in the village. He worked and I helped too; we had pigs and we ploughed the land. All this time, I also worried for my parents I left behind, and I still thought about going back. My father was 60 and my mother was 70 at the time, and I was their only child. I sent them packages where I put some of the long lasting food from my refugee aid packages, like feta cheese and cans. It was very difficult to survive this war in the closed city but they did it somehow. One liter of cooking oil was 100 Deutsche marks; there was no bread. My parents would receive 2 slices of bread for two days. My mother would go to the Red Cross to get some cooked food for them. It was my mother who got around; my father didn't leave the apartment for 6 months. It was not the same for everybody, but for most people it was very difficult to survive. Some neighbors made gardens in the apartment complex, and then people would steal from each other anything that grew from the ground. Throughout the war neighbors were not good to my parents. They didn't want to talk to them. Neighbors threatened my parents and my father didn't want to go to the basement during shelling raids. After the war, it seems to be a different story. These same neighbors who were terrible during the war now ask my mother every day if she needs something from the store. They buy her groceries whenever she needs it.

When I think about all this that happened, it looks like a dream. Like in a dream, I cannot believe that all this had happened. And when I go back there, I see all these changes, but it is still hard to believe. I still love to go there. I went for a month last year, and for two months a year before that. When I went there for the first time after the war, it was very hard. My childhood friends didn't change, but everything around changed completely. The city is completely different; it feels different. People I used to work with that are still there are still the same; they didn't change. I am not sure, though, about people who came there during the war.

I mean, that all was horrifying, that period in exile until I got married again, it was the hardest in my life. When I got married again, it was easier. But then, whatever Milan wanted to do, his father wouldn't let him. Milan wanted to make a big barn to have lots of cows, but his father didn't like that. Then Milan wanted to plant watermelons, his father didn't let him. Then Milan built a restaurant on a highway, but couldn't finish it because he didn't have enough money, but his father didn't help out.

That's why we decided to come to Canada. His father couldn't believe that Milan would actually go away and leave his big property there. Milan did. But I must say that it was hard when we got to Canada. Nine different churches were our sponsors. There was a man, who came from Yugoslavia 50 years ago, who acted as our translator. He gave us all lame advice, like not to go to social services because that would have stayed on our record and we would never get a job again and stupid things like that. But we didn't know and we were scared. There were 5 of us, we had to look for work and we couldn't speak the language well. It felt like being severely disabled. I looked for any job, just to put kids through school. We looked for anything just to work. I got work

packaging vegetables and I stayed there for 9 years. I was paid well because I worked all night shifts. After I lost that job, I couldn't find another one for the next 6 months. Now I have this job, I work 2 days and 2 nights but I am so scared because I don't know if I am going to stay here.

My husband was in a crash and he couldn't work for full 4 years; he almost lost his arm. In 4 years, he didn't make any money. My daughters worked, one at the Walmart, and the other one at the Home Depot. When we first came, I was happy to have ran away from that chaos over there, however, in a little while, when I saw this different system, that you have to take your kid to and from school every day, that you worry if somebody would steal your child, then I wondered if we did the right thing by coming to Canada. I wasn't sure anymore. I had to work two jobs and Milan worked two jobs until he got injured in a crash. I don't know, it might be better that I am here, there is nothing over there, there is no work and without work you can't live. The only thing, I would be around my people that speak the same language, even though, I am an outsider now in the countries of the former Yugoslavia just like I am here.

I don't know about other people, but my body is here and my thoughts are over there. I can't sleep at night, maybe because I think about how it was before when I used to work in Bosnia and about my friends. I feel as if everything is a dream and I would go back. I don't have anything here. I feel I can't breathe and I have to open the window. I have a feeling I will suffocate. I constantly go back in my dreams to how it was before in my life, only to 1992. I see myself at work, with my friends. I feel that all this is a dream, and I will go back to my city as it used to be. But there is no return, there is no

return. Wishes and reality are not the same. I could not leave my children behind and I don't know where I would go either.

I miss my country, my city, I would love the most to go back to my city as it was before, I would only love to go there where I was born and spent my entire life before the war. But I can't return. How can I go back? Even if I left my two older girls behind, where would the youngest one go to school? Everything is divided over there. Muslims go to their schools, Croats to theirs, and Serbs to their schools. There is no return, and I doubt that I could get a job.

I had my old friends in Bosnia, friends I grew up with, and I had lots of friends at work as well. I have friends here, a family from Bosnia I know for 13 years now. My husband met the father of this family at work, and we became very good friends. Our children are good friends too. With Canadian people I only talk at work, nothing more than that. When we first came, we would get together with people from the church that sponsored us, but that was all very formal and we never had any close and warm relationships. I worked 2 jobs, and my husband worked 2 jobs, so we really didn't have any time to get together with people even if we wanted. I still have two jobs now. I have to. I have no choice.

After my husband got money for his injury, he returned to Serbia and left us here. Maybe he was scared that I would spend all of his money, I like to change furniture often. We are divorced now even though we still have a good relationship, and I still hope that he would come and live with us again. It is more because of our daughter so she can have a father. It is because of me too, I would have more support and I would be less scared. I am really scared that I will lose a job and I don't know what will happen to us

then. I don't have anybody here. He is more practical than I am, he can figure out how to make money even if he doesn't have a job. I am not that skilled. If this company shuts down, I will not sleep again for nights and nights. After I was laid off the last time, for 7 months nobody phoned me after I submitted hundreds of resumes everywhere. It is a really scary situation for me. Before the war, I felt safe. Even when my first husband got sick, I had my job, my parents, my aunt, and my friends. Now I am alone, totally alone, and the worst of all is that jobs are very unstable here; today you are needed, the next day you are not needed. This economic crisis brought lots of instability.

The most important thing for me now is that I am healthy and that I have a job. It was the hardest to live through the exile. At least, now I have a roof over my head, and I am not hungry. At least, we all have some kind of work. I am not fluent in English so I cannot expect any special job even though I have university education. I worked 9 years on packaging. It was well paid, even though I did work all night shifts. But I am not in a position to be picky, it is important for me to work so I can survive.

My older daughters are satisfied, even though both say they would love to go back. They were already 13 and 12 when we came to Canada. They say they would like to go back and live in Serbia. That is what they say, but they know they can't find a job there. I doubt they will go back. Maybe if they find a good job over there. I think people would go back if they could get a decent job over there. I don't know, some people like it here, some people like it more over there, it is a different culture and different system. Some people already went back. Retired people can go back, they can live over there with their pensions.

My husband went back to Serbia. It is not all good for him though. People ask to borrow money from him. When he says that he doesn't have any to lend, friendships fall apart. People think that he has lots of money. Milan says to me not to dream anymore, but I can't. I am always there in my thoughts, only the beautiful part of my life until 1992. After the war, things changed over there too. Privatization brought long working hours, so people don't have time to get together like we used to have. I saw it when I visited my mother. My friend goes to work at 7 am and comes home at 5 pm, almost the same how I work here. Only that life until 1992 was beautiful, after 1992 they also have only work and house. Still I would like to go back because of the language.

If only Zoran stayed alive, it would have been different for kids and for me. Milan is a good man. When I decided to marry him, I only thought about safety for my children and that he would provide a better life for them. But both my girls had told Milan a thousand times that he was nobody to them and that he didn't have any right to say or order anything to them. The girls would shout at us, and I was scared to do anything about it, because they often told me how somebody's mom from school called police to kick out her boyfriend from the house. I was scared to hit them; I didn't know what might happen. If only Zoran stayed alive, they might have even finished university. All this has been very difficult, but we survived, and that's it.

Boriša

I was sitting with my wife drinking our first morning coffee when a first grenade exploded. I came to the window and saw how grenades were falling on the top of the roofs. It occurred to me the war was imminent. It was April 6, 1992 when the Serbs bombed for the first time that part of the town where we had rented our place. There was a commotion in the building, everybody ran to the basement. Almost everybody there was Muslim, only two Serb families and some mixed marriages. Some of our Muslim neighbors already had guns, and they patrolled at night, apparently to protect people from Serbs. That is what they told us. Serb families were told not to go back to their apartments while others could go if they desired.

I understood that the war was on, and I couldn't eat or sleep, I was very nervous. Knowing our history, I was scared that my wife and I would be butchered. I truly believed in that, especially when a strange man came to live in our building. He was the first to come out armed, and he was enforcing order. I thought that he must have been some sort of organizer and that he was not there by chance. He was actually the executioner. I knew what happened in the WWI and what happened in the WWII, I felt like a lamb ready to be killed. I told my wife that we had to run away from there. I said the same to another Serb family, however, the young man was wary how would we pass the barricades on the roads; according to him it was futile even to try.

On the third day we were allowed to go back to our apartment, and than the next day all armed neighbors went to defend a Muslim army line; rumor had it that Serbs were trying to get through. As nobody around us had guns, we decided to run for our lives. We ran to our car, I don't even remember how we reached the bridge. I remember this

older man, around 70, asked us if we had guns, where we were headed, and he let us go. I drove probably 100 km/h through the center, as I heard that snipers were shooting.

We were lucky to get to my wife's parents place, but there was a constant shelling in their neighborhood. We stayed there another 3 or 4 days, and as these were the last days when one could get out of the city, we managed to get to the main bus station and got on a bus to my hometown. There were barricades on the road but we got through.

In my hometown, everything was still quiet; there were no armed people or any barricades. But it was a dangerous quiet before the storm. My older brother advised me not to stay there but to go to Serbia. In his own words, "I was not made for what was to come". I attended university and stayed to live in another city, so my connections with local people were not as strong. In light of this, at the end of the April, my wife and I left for Serbia.

I distinctly remember this journey. Untidy, bearded people with arms stopped our bus at least 15 times at various barricades. I was not sure who that was, but who ever it was, they let us get out from Bosnia.

We stayed with my mother's relatives in Serbia. I tried to get into some sort of routine there, but then I heard that "Bosnia was in flames". My brother got wounded when they fought their way through a corridor that connected this western Bosnian city with eastern parts of Bosnia. He was hospitalized for a month and a half. After he was released from the hospital, he came to see us in Serbia. He told me that if I didn't go back to Bosnia then, I would have been considered a traitor and runaway. On top of this, we started feeling our relative's irritation with us. They could not bear any longer to have us at their place, and we felt that we were not welcome there anymore. Besides, we

were refugees, and we were treated as such everywhere. As soon as you say a word with your Bosnian accent, they knew it. Among men, I felt that they considered me a deserter. They thought that my place was in Bosnia where I should defend my people. I was a stronger believer in going back than my wife, but on any account, we went back to Bosnia on August 3rd or 4th.

This journey stuck in my mind. We traveled at night a route where I had never traveled before, and I had driven to Serbia and back like a million times in my life. The bus took some village roads; we would stop often and pick up soldiers who were going on a home break from combat. All these people looked bloody and all of them had guns, like a scene from the movies. Then stories they were telling on the bus about battles, and just the fact that those were real guns and bullets was so unreal. I mean, a real bullet, a real gun. I was terrified. I felt numb. I remember the look on my wife's face. We were looking at each other in disbelief as to say "Oh my God where are we going!" But we did not have a clue where we were going. I realized the first day when I arrived in my hometown when they sent me immediately to combat.

My brother told me to go straight to the army headquarters. On August 5th I was sleeping in a trench. I would stay 20 days on my shift without bath or bed. I was so afraid, especially, because we came two weeks after a big battle against Croats and Muslims when 120 people were killed on our side. Croats and Muslim had tried to break through our army line. Nevertheless, when I went to register myself at the army headquarters, they dispatched me to this hill and my brother's reaction scared me. He just asked "why there?" That sounded so ominous while I was still trying to understand

what was happening around me. I just came back from this sleepy part of Serbia, and here there was shooting and shelling every day.

I realized that here like elsewhere, interpersonal relations were corrupted and corrupted people were in charge. Not everybody ended up in a trench, depending on personal connections. Who did not know anybody in charge and did not have any money ended up in a trench. I ended up in a trench.

My hometown used to have around 30,000 residents, and this was reduced during the war to about 3000. It became a ghost town. Residents fled, and left behind their property. Things were up for grabs. The human rapacity showed its worst face. People were grabbing everything; they were completely wrecking havoc on other people's property. They were taking away doors, windows, hot water tanks, faucets, even dry wall paper, anything and everything.

It so happened that my wife who started working at the municipality office, managed to find work for me in the office. They needed professional people, and I had been trained as an engineer. Even in the town it was not safe, because there was a Muslim military tank on the top of the hill that would shell streets daily. One could not walk streets just like that. People were killed daily. However, it was still much better than being in a trench. I could sleep in bed, eat normally and have a bath.

Unfortunately, I did not stay long at this job because I did not follow certain unspoken rules coming from powerful people in the town. This ruling group all belonged to the same party and they knew each other well. I came into a conflict with them because of something I did. My job was to clean the town of abandoned vehicles that crowded the streets. I would try first to find out the owners and then tow all of these

vehicles to a designated parking lot. What happened to these vehicles afterwards I did not know, but I was guessing. There were a lot of cars, big trucks, and construction machinery. Some were very expensive, I would say anywhere between 200,000 and 300,000 Deutsche Marks at the time. I came across three big expensive trucks in front of one abandoned Muslim house in one of the suburbs. I towed all three of them to a designated spot. The next day, a man came into my office with documents to pick up these trucks. Apparently, the trucks' owner gave a power of attorney to this man to look after his trucks. The document was dated from before the war started. I realized that this man had a bad reputation as he had his own paramilitary troop; however, as he had this document, I gave him a permission to remove those three trucks. Hardly an hour had gone by when the owner of the company who provided a tow truck phoned. He was related to the mayor of our town. He screamed at me from the top of his lungs, called me all sorts of names because I let these trucks go, and it did not pass long I was back in the trench. I simply got a summons.

It was all a scheme. They were selling other people's vehicles and putting money in their own pockets. I felt horrible; I came back to defend my people from Croat and Muslim attacks but I realized that while most poor people were in combat every day, these people, municipality officials at the time, were the crooks. The truth is that in the war only bad lot benefits, and ordinary people suffer. The same happened on all three sides.

In any event, the next three years, I spent in combat. Fighting, wounded people, killed people, wounded friends, dead friends. I lost at least 30 close friends in this war, people that I shared everything with. We were in trenches together. And they died for

nothing; I don't even dare to think about their families. All those were young men, about 20 years old, some of them just married with babies. That was the hardest period in my life and I lived through many difficult times in this war.

I ran again into some interpersonal problems. There were 6 of us, in our troop, who were better educated than the rest. Mainly, soldiers were local peasants, and we kept telling them that we had been bleeding for the crooks. The culmination of our revolt was when they sent us as a paid army to help out Croats to defend the territory they took over. Croats expelled Muslims from the neighboring town, but they did not have enough people to hold that territory and protect from the Muslim counter attack. So they expelled Muslim population, women, kids, men, elderly, and pushed them towards Serb held territory. Serbs in trenches had opened the fire; they did not know who was coming from the other side. These people started running back straight into the Croats fire. They said there were between 70 and 80 people all together. A slaughterhouse. Horror. At least, this is the version Croats told us.

Six or seven of our troops came to help out Croats and we were ignorant that they paid for us. They told us that there was a price-list. For every killed soldier, they would pay 700 Deutsche Marks, and for wounded depending on the degree of a wound. We sat together in a café and they showed us a movie how they decapitated a Serb and then kicked his head on the ground. We told them we did them the same way up on the hill. Those were kind of sick war jokes. We confronted our commander about the money and what he asked us was where did we think arms and ammunition came from.

As I was the loudest, one day I was summoned to the army authority. Three people had sat around the table, and they started asking me questions. One of them

pointed a lamp in my face. They had warned me that if I continued talking too much, something could happen to my wife or me. I had my gun with me. I did not go anywhere without it and I was ready to use it. I said to them again that I was there to defend my father and my town, but not to be a paid soldier and defend territory for Croats.

My brother decided to flee Bosnia at this time. I did not blame him. We had been witnessing a sickening rapacity everywhere. It was extremely difficult to endure that once you understood what was happening. These peasants did not believe me when I was telling them. They didn't see the point of me telling that, because what other options they had. Should they stop fighting? I did not have an answer to this question. In their minds was only how to do the work around their houses, how to reap crops, feed cattle, pigs. They didn't have time for politics; they only thought how to stay alive. I kept saying to them that we had to go home to protect our homes because Muslims could come and destroy everything while we defend Croats. I have to admit that in this part of Bosnia, Croats and Serbs had had traditionally good relationships. Croats had let us know several times that Muslims were preparing attack and they saved us. I heard that Croats helped Serbs to get out of Zenica. I guess it depends on the region. In Lika and Herzegovina, Croats had been the worst butchers of Serbs, but in northern Bosnia, it was different.

In addition to the war horror, I still had interpersonal problems. I just did not want to be there anymore, I had it with them, and they could have done whatever they wanted with me. My army superiors offered me to go with the advance guard so not to be in a trench anymore. That was a group of 20 to 30 people who went across the army line to make reconnaissance, to see where is the other side's line, to look for and put away mines. When there was an action, we went first. We routinely lost one or two men

every month, and we would get new people. These were all young, very young men, from 17 to 20 years and as an older guy, I was their leader. There was another older guy, a drunkard, who spent the whole war with this group. One half of my war experience was in the trenches, and the other half was with this advance guard. I don't know which one was worse. In trenches, it was difficult to keep watch the whole night, and to endure sleeplessness and poor food. On the other side, in this advance guard, I lost so many people. Kids, kids, those were kids. They didn't think much; they went without fear. We were telling them, think, don't go like that. There might be somebody there or there, there might be a mine. They didn't think that way; they just wanted to carry the order. They behaved like Rambo. Nevertheless, it took lots of courage to go like that when you knew somebody was there on the other side ready to fire or there were mines everywhere. These were very brave young men. Whenever I think of them, I can't stop my tears from rolling down. They didn't have any military training, didn't really know how to read a topographic map or use a compass. Sure enough, we had some classes but that was not enough. They were killed in that number because they were so young and inexperienced. Some were killed because a grenade or bomb would come down all of a sudden and that could happen to anyone, but some of them went without fear straight into fire. I remember once, we were lying down in a shelter on the line, waiting. And one of these young men, all of a sudden, got up and started running straight towards the other line. We were numb; we couldn't believe it. He must have known that the other side was ready to shoot, what was in his mind we had not known. Miraculously, he stayed alive even though he had totally risked his life.

There was this girl who fought for the Croats. Her face is imprinted in my memory. I hardly heard her ever talking, but when she would get a command, she would just go, even though everything was on fire and detonations everywhere. She didn't care. When you stay in combat for a longer time, let's say two weeks continually, either you are attacking somebody, or running away but don't know where you are running, when you are in combat, you start doing this as this is normal.

Once, when I was in a trench, I got up and went to smoke a cigarette. I went to the part where a sniper was shooting. I guess I just didn't care anymore. I had it with everything, I could not suffer anymore, so I thought if I were wounded they would take me to the hospital and I would not have to stay here anymore. It was a way out of this misery. It was a total misery, four years of misery. I believe that all these people survived four years of utter misery and despair.

The advanced guard went ahead of other troops. One day before the action, we were told the exact time of the action, and we had actions every month. Later, we started faking. So they would tell us go here and here. We would go, find a good shelter, and start firing. The other side would start firing back right away. There would be such a fire, that one would think people are dying there for sure. Then we would wait until everything becomes quiet, and we would go back and say that there was nothing we could do as they saw us coming. Once we wanted to fake it like that but ran into a minefield. Two of our men were killed. There was a yelling from the other side to take the bodies away so they don't stink when they rot close to their line. They promised not to shoot, but we did not trust them entirely. Somehow with crawling and hiding we managed to take the bodies of our two dead friends.

I remember particularly one action. It was a serious action. We wanted to move into the Muslim held territory to remove that tank that was shelling the town from the hill. I didn't sleep the whole night; I had a knot in my stomach because I knew that tomorrow I could be dead. I did not have any choice, I would be transported on the Muslim side, and there is no way you can hide somewhere. It was August, early morning, I remember the stillness, the smell of summer, I heard birds singing, as we were moving into this territory. Indeed, this action was fiery. I cannot even begin to describe the intensity of fire. We were firing through the small opening on the tank, and I had a hard time filling these frames with bullets that is how much ammunition we spent. That lasted about an hour and a half, the main attack, after which we got out of tanks but they ran away. Like a movie Terminator. One of us got killed, and lots of people were wounded. What was the worst of all, after this fight, I was completely exhausted and hungry, but I had to stay another three days to guard this territory we had captured and to sleep on the ground. After three days, we went back and other troops came to stay. However, Muslims made a counter-attack and pushed our army back again.

We went up again to close the line. Our commander didn't tell us whose army was up there, just go and close the line. The line was a half-circle shaped trench on the top of the hill. This trench was an adult's height at the ends and then as you walked towards the center, it lowered to your knees. Somehow, we split while we were climbing and I stayed alone. I came first to the trench, jumped inside, and started walking. I was extremely tense because I expected any moment to run into somebody. I was ready to shoot. Suddenly, I saw a man squatting down with a gun, looking somewhere down towards Muslims. A thousand thoughts ran through my head, if I shouted to drop the

gun, he could have shot me; I did not have anywhere to hide. In a split second, I just thought I had to fire and save myself. Luckily, I noticed another man coming from the other side and I recognized him. We fought together at the beginning of the war. He was talking something to this man, and I realized that I could have killed an innocent man. That was a horrible feeling, and it still lives in me. I did not tell them anything.

There was another similar situation. Muslims started fighting among themselves and we helped out one of the sides. This fighting was in the city, street combat from house to house. I was hiding behind one house when I saw a man come outside. He was looking for something, about 20 meters from me. I watched him and then shouted "Hey you fool go inside, I could shoot you any moment"! He stopped for a moment, turned around and ran inside. It never even crossed my mind to kill somebody just like that. I believe that I was in a similar situation at least 3-4 times where somebody was watching me and could have killed me but didn't. That means that not everybody was a bloodthirsty animal. We were normal people who simply were drawn into this war, not because we wanted to fight but because we were sucked into it. Crooks stayed in towns to steal and pushed us to fight. We did not have a choice. I did not want to run away, that was my country.

I waited for the end and the end came after the Dayton agreement. It was really the end. We were so happy, because we knew that no one would be killed anymore. We were truly happy. We stayed as soldiers longer, we couldn't go home to sleep, but armies started to empty lines and UNPROFOR was taking over. It was an incredible relief, it was the end of the war, and we understood that we were going to stay alive.

I cannot decide in my thinking if I did a right thing by staying in the war. On one side, I believed I had done the right thing because I protected my parents so they could stay in their house, on their land and did not have to leave like some of my neighbors, Croats and Muslims had to. My school friends had to leave, they couldn't stay to live there anymore, just like Serbs on Croat and Muslim sides had to leave. Sad. It is heartbreaking to see people who worked hard their whole life in Germany like temporary guest workers, saved money, build homes, only to abandon those and loose everything but life. There was nothing I could do about this. There were some killings I heard about, but you cannot put yourself between a maniac with a gun and a victim. I would become a victim. You cannot talk to these people; they are not normal people. After "Operation Storm" happened in August of 1995 thousands and thousands of refugees went through our town. There were soldiers among them who still had guns. Some of them took revenge on local people in this town. If they heard that there was a Croat or a Muslim in town they would go there. That was how my neighbor, a Croat, died. I was sad for this man; he had been a good neighbor. He had stayed in his house the entire war and nobody touched him. He felt safe near my brother and me. I wasn't there when he was killed, but even if I were there, I doubt that I could have done anything. I could have only been killed instead of him.

On the other side, when I think how those who ruled, who grabbed everything they could, used us, I feel like an idiot. Bags of money disappeared from banks without a track. How could they otherwise all of a sudden drive these most luxurious vehicles, own restaurants and cafes other than from stolen money? I felt torn throughout the war, on

one side, I felt pride that I was defending my people and my heritage, and on the other, I felt that the town leaders used us for their benefit.

I felt lost, insecure. I was not sure whether I was doing the right thing or not. I felt I wasted my time. Maybe not so much at the time, but now I clearly see I wasted my time. While people in other parts of the world lived, worked, acquired things, I wasted my time in the war. Just to live through that was horrible. It would have been better for me if I had stayed in Serbia as a refugee. I would have not experienced these horrible things. I don't have nightmares like some of my friends I talk to, but I have daily bad moments. Especially, when I have a break at my work, I spend that 1-hour break thinking about my parents, brothers, friends, war, and then when it's time to go back to work, I don't feel I can work. I feel sick; I am preoccupied with these thoughts so I cannot go back to work. I feel I am wasting my energy; I feel tired, because I push myself. I have problems because of these events and I know that. I try to fight it; I still have energy to fight that, especially because now I have a child, job, and I am aware that I should stop thinking about these things and concentrate on present and future. I am able to do that more and more, even though I think it is impossible for me to forget that war.

The hardest for me is knowledge that these things should not have happened. People say that what happened cannot be undone, but that should not have happened. I can not comprehend that that had happened and always think for myself why did it happened and I am always looking for who is guilty for this, and that is a waste of time and energy. Sometimes I think that whoever wanted to destroy Yugoslavia is guilty. Yugoslavia for me was SFRY, and I blame the West for a conspiracy against Yugoslavia. Of course they had support of the inside forces, just like in WWI and WWII, traitors who

wanted to destroy the system. All these presidents of all these new countries after the civil war are guilty of war crimes. Of course only Milošević and Karadžić are proclaimed guilty but starting from Slovenia, Croatia, and the rest who started all this mess, nobody took any responsibility for war crimes. Nobody took any responsibility for crimes against Serbs in Croatia. I hold Slovenia responsible the most for the war, and Austria and Germany, and also they had support of others, like Great Britain and USA. I can say that Canada also sent their bombers to bomb Serb's positions in Bosnia in 1995. I witnessed consequences of these bombings, I saw killed civilians on the ground. They know the best who bombed and killed innocent people.

I believe that we are not the only responsible side for the war in Bosnia; I feel we are the least guilty. The war was forced on us, and those stories that we wanted to ethnically cleanse areas are not true, because we were happy in that Yugoslavia. Somebody destroyed that Yugoslavia, and I believe that the West did not like that Yugoslavia as it was. Then they brought me here to build their country, and I don't feel great about that. What can I do now? What the heck, maybe it is better to be here than in Bosnia where everything is destroyed.

I have to say that when I first got papers for Canada, I was happy. I felt at the time that I fought for crooks and I was happy to leave. However, as time went by, people started to live normally again, now I think that I might have made a mistake. If I were there, it would have been much easier to go through these traumas because I would have been with my people. I miss everybody. I was not able to attend my father's funeral because I did not have a passport. That was a terrible feeling. I only talk with my brother on the phone, I don't see him, I don't see my cousins whom I have known my

whole life. The social life in Canada is completely different and it doesn't suit me. Take for example TV. I turn on the French channel because I see that we are culturally closer to them.

I don't have anything in common with these people around me, save family life. I would say that in that area we have similar goals and relationships; however, everything else is different. For example, work ethic, cultural ethic, books ethic, traffic ethic, all these are different. Sometimes I fear that my child, because she is a product of this society, will be this way and I fear I will not be able to accept that. I will never be able to accept this system as my system.

I feel that I don't belong here, I am trying to adapt as much as I could, but I fear I will never be able to accept this culture. It bothers me terribly when they say that we live in a multicultural community. That is a lie. I can see from the behavior of people whose first language is English that they think that they are somehow above us. Of course they would not say that openly, however, from their behavior I could tell that they do think that they are somehow better. How else could I explain the fact that I am paid less because they don't like my English. At the same time, when they display multicultural pride at every corner, I feel cultural discrimination everywhere. I mean literally everywhere. When I go with my daughter to soccer, if I say a word with my accent, everybody looks at me as if I came from Mars. I don't see a reason for that. I don't like to live with people like these, that is why I say that I will never belong here because I feel that people don't like me here. I would not feel that if I had stayed with my people in Bosnia. This really bothers me the most. I would agree to be less paid but tell me why are you paying me less. Because I have an accent and it takes me three days to write a

report in English. But I solve problems quicker than those colleagues who write reports faster. I am very frustrated. There is lots of residue from the war, and there are lots of things inside me. It is very difficult to find a good job if you have an accent and when you are coming from elsewhere. Plus it is very hard to start from scratch in your 40's.

I didn't anticipate that this would be happening to me in Canada. When I came, I was very happy because there was no shooting, no commanders, no municipality officials to fight with, no crooks who stole everything they could and now they are the big shots who kick us who fought and bled in this war. I felt great when I got here, they gave me a little bit of money, but I was content because I came from the country where there was no money for four years. I mean there was money but it was not worth anything. I lived on bread and water and now here I could sit down to have a coffee without anybody yelling at me and sitting on my shoulders. There was no war here, and that peace was so beautiful for me. I did not notice any cultural differences or any other differences. I was not looking for a job, I wanted to learn language first, and everything looked rosy, like new life was starting again.

In reality, I was blind and dumb; I did not see what lies ahead of me. I am not talking about reality that one has to work to live, but I did not expect such a difficult way. I did not want to clean my whole life. At least, I had a degree; I was trained as an engineer in Yugoslavia. I wanted to do the job that I had the training for. But I did not even dream how difficult it would be to get a professional job, especially for a nervous system like mine that is undermined in the war. I had to invest five times more energy than somebody who finishes school here. It was more difficult for me than for immigrants from Rumania, Bulgaria, or Germany. These immigrants come here to

change their lives, they come with some money and they have a recent work experience. I spent four years in the trenches; I didn't even know what was ordinary life anymore.

I made a mistake and I know that now. My child was born and goes to school here. She is a Canadian, and I have to accept her as such. I know that her future is here and that is my sacrifice. I am trying to change myself, to convince myself that is not a sacrifice but life. This is my life in Canada, this is a reality, and I am a Canadian now. But this is very hard to accept. This is a constant struggle that goes on inside me. I want to convince myself that I am a Canadian, that I came of my own will, I accepted to come, but I can't. Past cannot be forgotten. It has been a continuous friction and an inside struggle, and it might never cease, even though time helps. I succeeded at least in some areas in Canada, I work as an engineer now, and I am becoming more content. But this has been so hard that I cannot put it in words. This topic would be good for Dostoyevsky. I read War and Peace by Tolstoy to ease my struggle, but I couldn't find myself there. I read books in hope that will help ease my misery. I go to bed but then start thinking about all this. I try to stop, but I can't. Then I try reading books to find somebody with whom I could identify, who have similarly suffered and it helps me.

My struggle is a result of everything that happened, I couldn't separate the war experience from my Canadian experience. It is like a ball of wool all intermingled. At times, I have a feeling that it was easier during the war than in Canada because it is so hard for me to relate to Canadians. I am faced with prejudice everywhere, at my work, in social situations, in grocery stores. If there is a native English speaker in line ahead of me, a cashier is kind and considerate, and when my turn comes, if I say a word with my accent I run into unkindness, rudeness. Not everybody is like that, but the majority. I

might be exaggerating, because this is constantly cooking in me. People instantly change their facial expression when they realize you are an immigrant. The expression goes from a smile to a serious look saying “oh there is another one who can’t speak English, who knows where this one is coming from, another dirty immigrant.” There is disgust on their faces. This might be my imagination, but I am certain that they are not glad to see me, or to talk to me or to relate to me in any way. I don’t know what is in their heads, but their expression tells me that they don’t like to talk to me. They might be thinking that I am coming from a different culture and they need to be cautious with me. They might be scared of me; they might think I am barbarous and aggressive. Why did they kill that Polish man at the airport? Why did they pull a taser gun at him? From my point of view, he might have behaved normally, but for them not, and they killed him. That is a proof that they behave differently towards people who can’t speak English. My kid doesn’t have any problems in school because her English is good, but I will have problems until I live.

Bad manners bother me. At work, a person who sits next to me does not even greet me upon arriving. This type of behavior is killing me, because it pushes me to close myself, because if he doesn’t want to talk to me than I totally don’t want to talk to him. There are people who don’t pay attention to this stuff but I do. My nervous system has weakened in the war, and if the war didn’t happen, I would not have had been here.

Relationships between people here and in the old country are very different. There was a spiritual closeness and connection, not only with relatives, but also with friends and colleagues. There is nothing like that for me here. People don’t have time to get together, and everybody is somehow reserved. We only get together with people

from our own ethnic community. I don't have any Canadian friends. I have not run into anybody who would show some sincere interest in getting together, I tried but it didn't work out. People associate only because of some gain. My daughter has a play date with other kids, but we as a family, as adults, have not established any relationship with another Canadian family.

People move constantly, they go after work, and we lived there where we were born. My father died in the place where he was born. That is an important matter; it is a spiritual question. You don't have that here. Even here, people might wish that grandparents look after the kids, but the economy dictates differently so you have to keep moving.

I miss tremendously the presence of my closest family and friends. The life does not consist only of a child, work, and your immediate family; I miss profoundly my extended family. I cannot afford to go often to see them, we talk on the phone but that is a poor substitute for being with them. I have not found friends here like I had there. I don't have time to get together with people. I also worked 8 hours a day in Yugoslavia but that didn't stop me from being with friends all the time.

There is an economic reason for being in Canada, especially when you think that Bosnia went back in time 100 years, that means there is no future there for my child. Personally, if I had survived the worst time there, I could live there any time. I do think sometimes that I should have stayed there because I would have probably gotten recognized in my profession and I would not have lived through this cultural shock, and that feeling that people didn't care for me which is hard to take. I feel like a second order citizen here. This is ever present, and I am extremely happy when I run into Canadians

who are open and kind, I love to talk to them but I have not had luck to have a relationship with any of those people either because of different age or status.

The only reason for me to stay here is the future of my child. When people who mean something to me in Bosnia die, Bosnia will not be close anymore either. Whether I will die in Bosnia or here is all the same to me as long as I am close to my child. She dominates in my life, she is my priority, and she determines my feelings and what and how to do. If not for her, I would really have to ponder over what am I doing here, I would rather go to Bosnia to be with people I love until they are alive just as I had lived with them for 35 years. I miss it. I miss love. I don't feel love here. Whether I go to work or anywhere I go I don't feel love, I feel that people are prejudiced against me and in some way I feel hatred. I feel alone. Lonely, uncared for. I feel all by myself. Who do I have here? A few friends who are in the same situation, who probably think and feel similarly, and have the same problems like I do. I don't have anybody to talk to who would understand. I miss people, I miss intimacy, and I don't have that here. I grew up like that, I was surrounded by lots of relatives and friends, and here I am alone. It would help if I started taking drugs, it would help me to forget reality. But I don't want to. I still have strength to fight. Time heals everything.

I used to be a hippy Boriša, when I lived in Bosnia. I loved music, friendship. I used to be relaxed, peaceful, worriless. Even during the war, my only worry was to stay alive. I did not have this burden on my shoulders and this knot in my stomach that is constantly present here. I turned into a frightened animal that is scared of everything, from bank to my boss at work. I worked in Bosnia too, but I was never scared of my boss. I was well aware that I could be let go anytime, but I knew that I could find

something else and there were my people everywhere who cared and who would help. I felt close to people and safe. I don't dare even think about the possibility of being laid off, banks are at my back, boss is at my back, and the whole world is at my back.

Constant anxiety. All I think of is how to pay bills, then problems at work, will I be laid off or not. This economic crisis brought a lot of worries for me. I carry a debt that I would not be able to pay if I am unemployed. Most likely, I would have to declare bankruptcy. I realized that my best friend in Canada is the bank because they lend me money to live. My father borrowed money from his sister and brothers to build his house and buy a car and then he paid them back with no interest. I have to pay high interest to the bank, but that is how this system works, so at the same time bank is your best friend and your worst enemy.

It would be terrible to be laid off. My daughter would have to stop all her activities. The economic insecurity is high for us because we started out late and economically we are very unstable, and then the community did not accept us the way we thought it would.

In essence, I am one very nervous human being. I used to love people. I used to love to talk to people, to listen to their problems, always ready to help, I wanted to help. I saw myself as a person who was there to help others and that filled me with happiness. I loved people. Here, I don't love people because I feel they don't love me. And that is missing in my life. For 35 years I used to be one kind of a person and now somehow I am different. There is only emptiness now; there is nothing to fill in the void. There is my child and my wife. It is sad to say, but I used to be full of love for my wife. She told me recently that I don't have any understanding for other people anymore. She told me

how I changed and I have to admit it was not easy to hear what she had to say. My relationship with my child is the only one where I try to be a good, patient Boriša. Everybody gets on my nerves, and I reject a priori everything people say. I don't like this new Boriša. I would rather be the old one, the relaxed happy one. I am a miserable and unhappy one.

Canada has been one big struggle. I have never had a steady job, I did everything from pizza delivery, toilette cleaning, building maintaining to an engineer who is almost 50 years old. There should be a law against treating people in this way. You cannot treat people this way. Not only that I felt humiliated but I also felt deep down that something was wrong with me. If I worked as an engineer before, and now I am cleaning water closets, something is wrong with me. I am not against any work, however, people don't won't to have anything with me when I clean water closets for my work.

I must say that the Canadian consul in the embassy told me that I had a small chance of getting work in my profession. However, at that time, I would have come regardless. I didn't care. After 4 years in the war, I didn't care what I would do; I needed piece and quiet. However, when I later realized that I might be more capable than some people around me who do professional jobs, I became restless. I had a lot of problems with a lack of recognition of my degree from Yugoslavia. If I had had a degree from UBC, I would have gotten a job right away, but I experienced a lot of difficulties. Another problem now is that all I do is work. I don't have any other aspect of my living but work. I have to work all the time to make ends meet.

Regardless of the problems, Canada is special for me because we got a child here. We could not have a child for a long time and we got it in Canada. This child has

changed me in numerous ways. The life looks now empty without a child. I was happy without a child but now I cannot even imagine my life without her. I don't know what I would do, how would I spent my time? I spend all my time with her. I take her to activities; we play piano together, do her homework. I lost my interest in other things, save my profession.

There is emptiness in my entire soul, a drought. I wish I could go back to Bosnia but how can I start again from scratch at 50. Going back is a dream that will never go away. It is a reverie, similar when people daydream about winning a lottery. That is how I daydream what I would do if I went back. Everything is in weeds now; nobody takes care of my father's land. It is a shattered dream, my father lived long enough after the war stopped, we could have done something, and we could have lived some of our dreams. I cannot forget these things. I have always been very emotional, it would be easier if I were not, it would be easier to fall asleep at night, I would not think some stupid thoughts like why Canadians don't like me, why there is a cultural discrimination and such? I became a very suspicious person, and I have never been like that. This system made me that way. It hurts to be like this. I never hated anyone, I always loved people. Why people cannot give any love back? I did not grow up like that, surrounded with this indifference. I became very close with my fellow soldiers in the trenches. Those were good, emotional, simple peasants. There was a real connection between us. I am like them. I could not get along with crooks that manipulated people. Somehow, educated people were more inhumane than simple uneducated.

My life has been destroyed. Nothing happened the way I was hoping it would. I feel that my life has been destroyed. I try to compensate for this with some things; I try

to help myself. I say to myself that my life is good, I have a family, I have a job, but this sentence “Your life has been destroyed” is like a verdict. It is always there; I cannot get rid of it. You are not yourself anymore; you don’t live like you wanted to live. I think about things from my past and I think about Yugoslavia, I think about the ways I learned to work. Everything reminds me that my life has completely changed and I translate that into destroyed. It should not have happened this way, my personality cannot accept this and I cannot find peace.

Tatjana

On the morning of April 6th, I fled the city in Bosnia where I attended university. I was a second year student of English language and literature. My girlfriend and I rented a place where we stayed during the week and on the weekends I would go to my hometown to stay with my family. The day before I left, I received a frantic phone call from one of my friends who lived in a student dormitory. She screamed on the phone and I could hear lots of commotion in the background. She told me that they had been kicked out from the dormitory and that they had to leave. People with guns were kicking them out, everybody was running away and she phoned me to say that I should not stay any longer in the city. It was Bayram that morning, there was a lot of shooting and it was a kind of a scary situation. My and my roommate’s boyfriends had picked us up and we left for my hometown. All four of us were from the same town.

When we arrived there, everything seemed as usual. I couldn’t feel any tension. Honestly, I was not aware of any tension in the city I fled either, but my social life in that city was scarce. I mainly studied, attended lectures and spend weekends in my hometown. My parents did not think that anything could happen at home. My brother,

who was 26 at the time, did not think anything would happen either. However, some of my parents' friends, a Muslim family, that had a close ties with the army, cautioned me to consider finding a shelter elsewhere. They said because I was a young woman, it was better to be safe than sorry. They influenced my decision to leave my town and go to Serbia for a little while.

Before I left, I phoned my best friend, a Muslim, to tell her that I was going to Serbia for a few days. I felt uneasy when she said that it was good that I had somewhere to go. She didn't have anywhere to go. This was difficult for me to hear.

Around April 20th, I left for Serbia to stay with my relatives. Both of my parents were born in Serbia and all my relatives lived there. I only had a little backpack and books because I thought I was going for about 10 days to study for the exam and I would be back. There were no signs that things would turn out the way they did. True enough, after 10 days I had enough of Serbia and my relatives. I cried every morning when I talked to my mom on the phone. I wanted to go home badly. However, all of my friends, who were of all ethnic backgrounds, told me to stay put for a little while. Everybody was apprehensive about what would happen on May 15th, the date the Yugoslavian army was leaving the town. People were aware of the incident that happened in another town involving the leaving army convoy. Indeed, on the May 15th, a catastrophe happened. Around 200 soldiers were killed when they were leaving the town in a convoy. My mother in law watched this through her apartment window. She saw young soldiers' bodies on fire. The night before somebody put the explosives in the asphalt. After this happened, the town was shut down. There was no way out or in. My boyfriend left the

town that morning just before the army convoy. My aunt and uncle also left the town that morning but my parents and my brother decided to stay.

After this, months of complete insanity came along. I talked to my family on the phone for the first three months until August when all connections were cut off. Up until then, at least I could talk to them and I knew they were alive. All this seemed unreal to me. I could not believe that this was happening to me, in my own life, especially because I left behind my closest family. My mother was so scared that borders would close and we would not see each other maybe 20 or 30 years. Something like that happened in Germany.

Every day, when I was coming back to my relatives' house, I hoped to see their red car Lada. I hoped they would somehow sneak out of town and come here. I just did not believe that this was happening, and I thought this must come to an end soon, so I did not even try to enroll into another university in Serbia. I expected that by September I would go back to my home and the university I attended. The whole of Bosnia was in flames and I thought I would go back to study there. I just could not believe otherwise. Everybody I knew, of all ethnic backgrounds, did not believe otherwise. However, my mother was telling me in July that I needed to continue my studies in Serbia because she heard that other students were doing the same. I transferred very late, but with help of a personal connection, I was still admitted to the one of better universities in Serbia.

The most difficult period in my life started when phone connections were cut off. This lasted until October when I was able to connect with my family via amateur radio. But in this period from August to October I did not have any news about my family. This was horrific. My brother was 26 and I thought he was mobilized for sure to fight in the

war. Then the news on TV and in the newspapers was all about terrible things happening in my hometown. Mass killings of Serbs, concentration camps, like 5,000 Serbs closed in a soccer stadium in wire, mass rapes and other horror stories. This war propaganda was well and alive on all sides but in my case this hit me especially hard because I did not have any way to contact my family. I simply did not know if they were alive and what happened to them. This is when my insomnia started. I could not sleep. I did not sleep literally one entire month, maybe an hour per night. I just could not sleep. Unfortunately, up to this day, I still have trouble with sleeping.

Along with all this, I had lots of trouble with my relatives, especially with my uncle, who was an alcoholic. It was very difficult for me to stay with them because they did not want me there. I felt like a burden. The whole situation did not have any end in sight. I heard all these stories how refugees from Bosnia and Croatia are to be blamed for all the hardships that people in Serbia have to endure, and because of refugees, Serbia suffers. I received help for refugees, but this help was very scanty because somebody already went through these packages and took away good things.

When I started attending school again, I moved away from my relatives. Student refugees, and I was one of them, were given accommodation in an abandoned hotel that was located about 20 km from the city where the university was. Everything in this hotel was old, and some things were quite dangerous too. It was not safe to drink the water, plumbing and electricity were unsafe, pipes were rusty, and an old man who used to work there asked all of us not to shower there. He was afraid that electric shock could kill somebody one day. We could not use toilet because it was always plugged, so we had to use the nearby bush instead. There was only a railroad leading to this hotel, and the train

was always late 2 to 3 hours. We would miss lectures daily. It was a complete chaos. One tried to study but that was extremely hard under the circumstances. A lot of people gave up studying and school. People were completely lost. The whole situation that we were in was surreal. People were looking for a way out of this chaos, for a way to forget. I guess this was how these big parties started to happen. Students in the hotel started them. They partied non-stop. One night, an older man who worked there in the hotel, rushed in on one of these wild parties. He was very upset and addressed all of those young people, especially men. He told them that they should be ashamed of themselves because they had ran away where it was safe and all they did was party violently while their parents and others had been dying every day in Bosnia. There was only silence everywhere. Once their masks fell, there was obvious despair on these young men's faces. I guess they were trying to run away from this reality and this old man brought them back in the middle of it by confronting them in this way. I never attended these parties but I was aware that they were happening and this night I happened to be there to watch this.

Later I succeeded in getting a place in a normal student dormitory. All this time, I was in a trancelike state. I only thought about my family, my friends, my town, I was not present at all. Once my cousin, who was giving me a ride to somewhere, told me that I must try to adapt because I was doing myself a disservice in this way. That was really hard for me. Nothing else existed for me and I hated this town and everything else because I was forced to be there. Then at one time during 1993, the terrible awareness came over me. I understood that there was no way back. Something broke in me than, because I had been constantly imagining how I was going back, and all my friends and

my whole life. Then I realized there was no return. This was very hard to live with. Earlier there was this hope that the war would end and I would go back to continue living my life, and after this realization there was no hope anymore. I had to cross out my hometown, my friends, and my previous life. After this realization, there was no beauty in my life anymore.

Even though my parents were aware of my difficulties with relatives and generally in Serbia, they were happy I was not with them because at least I was not in danger of being killed. My brother stayed with them, and he was their biggest worry throughout the war. Despite all fears, he stayed alive. Our Muslim neighbor, who was a policeman, warned him for about 90% of the raids. One time my brother was caught and taken to dig trenches for 7 days. Generally, throughout the war, nobody beat my parents or brother, but they were humiliated in other ways. My brother used to be a store manager before the war, and he was demoted to a doorman, then to janitor, and then he was fired. My father, who held a high position before the war in the company, was humiliated in various ways, and he was forced to retire early. My mother had the same destiny. She was a teacher, and she tried to show her loyalty by opening so called "basement schools". She was the first to organize these schools when the war started because kids did not go to any school. However, she was also forced to retire early due to various pressures at work.

My parents say that if this happens again, they would just close the door behind them. They would just leave. In this war, they were at the bottom. They almost died of hunger. Nothing was left to be sold in the house. An old TV and old rugs were worthless, and in the first years of war they had already sold car, piano, clothes. Later

only gold was accepted for food. They were hungry and cold. Their pension could hardly buy 1 kg of rice. It was not the same situation for everybody. Some neighbors had more than the others. My mother said what a joy it was when somebody would invite her for a cup of coffee, not so much for coffee but for sitting beside the furnace. Croats in the town had good help from “Caritas”, an organization that had a special permission to enter the town. Some neighbors were honorable people throughout the war, while others were not. I can understand that, even though my family never did anything to anybody and they stayed there and shared this tragedy with everybody else. But people were caught in this tragedy, they were lost, they were enraged, and somebody had to be guilty. They would kick my parents out of basement during the shelling raids. But my mother said as the war went on they became deadened to shelling, and they wouldn't even run any more but keep walking even though grenades would be falling all around.

I was hopeful to the very end that they would succeed in sneaking out of the town, but it never happened. They said that was impossible for them. First of all, there was a price to be paid for that and they didn't have any money for food, let alone to pay somebody to take them out of town. Also, it was very risky, because these people you pay would accompany you up to the certain border and then you would have to go through mine fields and then through territory of different armies. You could try, but you didn't know whether you would get out alive. My best friend, a Croat, came this way to Serbia. When he showed up at my door in dormitory, I almost fainted. It was the same as seeing somebody who rose from the dead. Later he left for England.

I wanted to quit my studying because I did not have any money. However, everybody around me encouraged me to continue. My mother pleaded with me over the amateur radio not to quit. I simply did not have any money either for food or clothes. My boyfriend worked long hours, and it was a huge shock for me when he offered me financial help. I never thought that I would be in a situation like this. I took the money but only when he said that I should not take it if I wouldn't be ready to do the same thing for him. My friend Diana, a Croat, who fled to Germany, had sent me 20 DM in a letter and some nice clothes. This meant a lot to me. I hardly had any clothes, and just the thought that she cared about me meant a lot.

My friends fled to different places, and we are now scattered all over the world. My friends are in Germany, UK, Canada, Bosnia, and other countries. My best girlfriend was a Muslim girl, Aida. We grew up together, and we were like sisters. I miss her tremendously. When I first went back home in 1996, I could not find anybody I knew there. Only when Aida came back to visit her parents, I had somebody to spend time with. At the same time, here in Vancouver, just in one block I see 20 people I know from my old country.

I never wanted to go anywhere else to live. My boyfriend, on the other side, had always wanted to go somewhere, even before the war. He tried different countries, like Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada. After sending 5 applications to the Canadian embassy, he got through. The fifth application was successful. The funny thing was that he had sent the 6th application in the meantime, and that one was rejected, but we were already in the process of getting papers because the 5th was accepted. We laughed about that.

This was another shock for me. I was 22, and I needed to tell my parents via amateur radio that I was getting married and going to the end of the world. They were still in Bosnia, and the war was raging everywhere. They did not have any chance of getting out. My father had sent me the most beautiful letter to support me. I felt horrible. I did not know when I would see them again because the whole of Bosnia was in flames. They were not present either on my wedding or at our farewell to Canada. The most difficult was when at the wedding the parents were called to take their designated seats. I did not dare turn around to look; I felt so much pain. I thought if I did, I would fall apart right there. My aunt reacted fast and helped me to feel better. She pulled my uncle and another cousin and they took those seats. My boyfriend's father was the only parent present. I simply never imagined myself like that. I never thought I would marry at 22 and then leave far away from my parents and my town. I knew that my boyfriend was the right person but still everything happened somehow too fast.

My boyfriend was overjoyed when Canadian embassy responded favorably. I was more uncertain. I was glad to leave at that time, because it was a complete chaos over there. All values were overturned, at that time our university professors were forced to sell things off street stands to survive. That was an unbelievable chaos. Hyperinflation was daunting; 100 DM in the morning was worth 50 DM in the afternoon of the same day. In addition to this, I had that understanding that there was no return home, and also where I was at the time was not home either. Because of all this, I thought it would not be bad to check out other places in the world to see how people live there and what was happening elsewhere. People around us were so excited for us; everybody from the student dormitory came to congratulate us. Literally, people were wondering why bother

coming to lectures any longer when we had visas to Canada. To most of these people this was like winning the lottery. No wonder, considering our circumstances at the time. Having opportunity to leave that inconceivable chaos looked indeed like winning the lottery.

We asked for Vancouver as we had some friends in this town, and also because my husband did not care for harsh winters. When we first arrived to Vancouver from that despair and uncertainty over there, it was like our honeymoon. We came in July. The weather was beautiful; it was like in a fairy tale. We were so exhausted with everything that happened in the old country, that we were quite happy for a few years here in Canada. Especially, in the second year, we borrowed a 10,000-dollar loan and sent this money to our families to help them to get out the town as the war was still going on. However, it was too risky for them to leave and that money helped them to buy food instead. I was very proud that I was able to help them in this way, because it was impossible to do much from Serbia. We could not send anything from Serbia, even food packages. I tried but they never received anything. When we talked via amateur radio, they would ask me what did I pack for them. I would say I'd put some bacon, and I would just hear them sighing. They told us that thanks to that help we sent from Canada, they were practically reborn.

I have a tremendous nostalgia that forces me to go to Bosnia at least once a year. As soon as it was possible to get into my hometown, I was on my way. The first time was 1996. I cannot describe how much I was afraid for my brother during all those war years. Also, one dumb thing happened just before I left for Serbia in April of 1992. We had a fight over some stupid thing, and we did not talk for two days. I lived with that for

more than 4 years and I didn't know if I would ever see my brother alive again. When I first met him in 1996, I was completely overwhelmed. My body collapsed completely. It shook violently and we both wept as we embraced each other. He waited for my arrival more than 5 hours because the bus I was on was late as we were held at the border crossing. Also, it was very risky for him to get to that place and wait for me, and my parents thought that somebody probably arrested my brother because we were so late. They were completely drugged when we came home.

Everything was so emotional. When I entered my hometown for the first time after believing that I would never be able to go there again, the emotions were overwhelming. If my husband was there with me, and somebody said stay, I would have stayed forever there. However, almost everybody said that it would be different to stay and live there, and it is different to come for a vacation.

It seems to me that things really improved there in the last 6 to 7 years. The real values came to the forefront again. People with integrity hold good positions again, and people started to live well again. They again can afford to go to the Adriatic and to skiing vacations and they live in their town. That is missing in my life. I miss my home. I don't feel grounded here. I envy people who accepted Canada as their home because we live here after all. I miss something. Everything is great here. We have lots of friends, and we get together with people and we travel but somehow deep down in my soul, there is emptiness. I cannot fill this void with anything. I miss my parents, my home. When I was growing up, I felt so secure, I had a beautiful childhood, and then suddenly I was ripped away from them. I am completely different person from who I was and from who I wanted to be. I am much more cynical than I would have ever been

if I didn't have to live through all of this. I grew up over night. I admit I was not a baby, but when I look at the 19 year olds here around me and when I think about my brother when he was 19, I see that something was taken away from my life. My life was shattered in that nice period when I should have been worriless and surrounded with my family and friends. I had both positive and negative experiences with people along the way, but we all came through this experience. How much all of us are damaged in various ways because of these events is a different story. I miss my girlfriends with whom I grew up. We had this special relationship that I cannot find anywhere with anybody else. There was this unlimited trust and freedom between us. I knew I could tell them anything and they would be ok with that. Somehow I cannot find that here with anybody. I do have good friends here with whom I share good and bad things in our lives; however, I feel somewhat reserved and not entirely free with them. It could be that I am the problem. I might be asking for too much, and I want things to be perfect. I miss my family and stability they give me and I miss people.

We've got a chance in Canada to try whatever we want. I haven't felt restrained in any way. One of the most honest experiences in all this was a farewell speech a Canadian ambassador made in Belgrade. He said that we were their best investment, beside humanitarian reasons. It was not a chance that exactly we were there leaving to Canada, all young and educated people. What can you do? I often think how would we behave if a situation was different and they had to come to our country. I am not sure how would we behave. I think Canada is an open country and people here are used to people from all over the world. I had a phenomenal experience with my former boss from the place where I worked. She embraced me from the beginning and said that I was

her 6th child; she already had 5. She said she was going to be my mother in Canada because my mother was far away. There was so much room in her heart. She did have her own difficult life story, and probably that was why she offered so much love to me. I don't think she is a typical Canadian, because other people around me are kind but not so open and accessible.

I am satisfied with my life in Canada, but I am not happy. I don't feel that serenity that I feel when I sit in a café in Belgrade watching people go by. It just feels good to be around those people there. I feel grounded. I feel that I belong. I don't feel that here. I live, work, everything is normal and I am not miserable and unsatisfied but somehow there is a hollowness. I think I would be entirely happy if Dejan said we were going back to Belgrade to live there. I could work as a translator and I would love that. I would have time to read books; my mother would be close by, my aunt, my cousins. Then I would walk with my friends, go for coffee. I could leave my kids with grandma over the weekend. That is why I think that my brother made a good decision not to come to Canada. We had all the papers done for him but he gave up. I think he made the right decision. He married again and has another child. You know his wife takes a nap every day when she comes home from work. She can do that. I cannot even picture myself napping, that image does not exist because here I constantly run to get to places and to do everything I have to do. It's been so hard to have a full time job and look after two small kids. My husband travels a lot and kids need to go to daycare. That's been a huge problem for me, the daycare. It is very expensive, it is hard to find a spot for my two girls, and the quality of care is low. I don't even try to remember names of these women who look after them because every day is somebody else. I literally don't know who is

looking after my kids. There is lots of room for improvement in this area in Canada. It is actually hard to imagine that Canada, one of the most developed countries in the world, has such a poor childcare system.

I believe that this war was forced on us. I believe it happened because of the foreign interests. There was no reason for this to happen. People could say whatever they want; we had a fantastic life in that country and when somebody says there was ethnic hatred in the country! What hatred? My best friends, I thought of them as my sisters, who would do anything for me and I would do anything for them, were a Muslim and a Croat, Aida and Diana. What hatred? I simply do not believe in separating people according to anything - let alone ethnic background. I never lived like that, nobody in my family believed in that and nobody around me, none of my friends behaved like that. Maybe I was in a unique situation in my town with my friends, but it is hard for me to believe that because I had met other Croat and Muslim people not from my own town and I don't see any difference between them and my friends. Everybody's lives were shattered in some ways with all this that happened to us, and everybody has a story to tell. Everybody suffered. No normal person of any ethnicity ever wanted this to happen. In those years of war, the worst lot came to the surface and did terrible things. The values were completely overthrown and we ran away from that because we knew that the war would eventually stop but we did not see anything good coming out of it. That is why all these people left. Out of desperation. I knew some men from my own hometown who became big warriors. I knew they never had a normal life. They lived their own frustrations, because in normal times they didn't amount to much. Their time came in the worst of times. I do believe that now the time is better again in Bosnia and that the right

people are getting to right places. I wouldn't mind going back myself. Lots of people are moving back, especially people from Serbia. My good friends are moving back this summer. They bought an apartment, and they will have a job. Their kids will go to school. There is no reason for them to stay here anymore. There will be not much difference in their economic status, and they will be among their own people. Being from Bosnia makes everything more complicated. Somebody would have to offer a good position to my husband somewhere in Serbia and he might go for it. My fear is that as children get older, it will be more and more difficult to return.

Zdravka

It was April 1992. My husband, Dragan, and I got up as usual in the morning and started for work. We had a 10 minute walk from our house to the company we worked for. We started working at 6:30 in the morning, and I would usually take kids to the daycare. They were 6 and 7 year old at the time. That morning, I would never know why, I did not do that. I had my brother in law and his wife living on the upper floor of our house and I thought I would just leave my girls to sleep and my sister in law would be there if they needed anything.

When we stepped out of the house, something felt different. There was this stillness everywhere. Usually, in the morning, we would see other people walking to work and this morning nobody was to be seen anywhere. My husband and I walked but not together as usual; first he walked ahead of me, than I walked ahead of him. We were not saying anything, but our looks were saying all the words. I heard about barricades on the news, but I thought of that as just news, not that we would have a war. Our doorman waited for us, flabbergasted. It never happened that nobody showed up for work.

Usually, at that time of the morning, buses would be arriving bringing people to work. This morning only a few buses arrived to tell us stories about barricades. Nobody wanted to stay at work, and we all decided to go back home. It was very unsettling. We rushed back home because our kids were alone without us. When we were halfway across the bridge, I noticed a man in a uniform, like the one old army use to wear, climbing up on to the bridge. I got really scared, and I felt shivers. Luckily we went over the bridge, just in time, because only 5 minutes after, the bridge was shut down and we would not be able to go home from any direction. When I realized this, a fear came over me so I didn't know if I was walking or standing in one place.

As we were approaching our home, we saw both girls peeking behind the curtain. My brother in law and his wife came down so we could all be together. We all stayed inside, turned on TV and starting listing the latest news. Children did not go outside and you couldn't see anybody, as if everything died. I started knitting a sweater to calm down and stop my thoughts. All of a sudden, there was a rapid fire from a machine gun and I thought I was dreaming. We heard that barricades were on the roads so it was not possible to get through. Neighbors started organizing themselves for patrols to protect houses. After 4-5 days, I still expected that this would eventually calm down, and I said to Dragan that I was going to the bank to take the paycheck and buy some food because we didn't have enough in the house. I went to our bank, it was still possible to take the money out, and like a fool, I didn't take all I had on my bank account, I took enough for groceries. I thought I would buy something for about 10 days until this craziness was over. Stores were already empty and I found a bag of flour, pasta, and liver cans.

Nobody talked on the streets; you could only hear people rushing and their footsteps. Everybody knew something was happening but nobody was saying anything.

The situation actually deteriorated over the next 10 days. Nobody in our house was putting on pajamas anymore; we could not sleep anymore. One early morning, around 5 am there was a tremendous noise at my front door. Dragan went to open even though I was hesitant. It was my brother, Zdravko, who came to take my kids and me with him to his house. He could not openly ask Dragan because he did not want to offend him, as my husband was a Croat and my brother lived in a neighboring Serb populated area. My husband didn't want to separate from us and my brother took us all with his car. We had to go through a Serb and a Muslim barricades. The Serb barricade was scary because my husband was a Croat and the Muslim barricade was scary because my brother was a Serb. My brother talked to all these people. He said that we were taking kids out and asked them not to keep us long as it could start shooting any moment. Sure enough, everybody let us go.

We came to my brother's house safely. My sister lived 2 km away in her own house and my mother lived in a small town an hour drive from there. At night, we would shut down all lights, we would sit in the dark, and nobody was talking. My children were not aware of where we were and what was going on. Zdravko and Dragan would go to get food and finish small jobs. Everybody knew that my husband was a Croat but nobody had any problems with that and they were not stopped from going anywhere. They even fetched my mother from a Muslim held town. They went through all barricades and successfully brought her to be with us.

Then it was May 6th, St. George, my sister's family patron's day, and we were getting ready to join the celebration. We were about to leave, and I was holding my older daughter's shoes in my hands at the front door when suddenly there was a huge detonation. My ears were deafened, my brother pushed girls inside and my husband fell and pushed me. That was a first grenade that fell on this place from a neighboring Muslim area and then shelling and snipers became daily. All neighbors came to my brother's house because he had a safe basement. We were like sardines on the floor. My brother's house was very exposed, on the top of the hill, so we brought down the gas range, fridge, everything that we could use in the basement, so nobody had to go on the upper floor. Shelling and snipers happened daily and people started leaving the area.

One day my brother came and said that situation was not looking up and we need to take the children out of this place. Men of army age were not allowed to leave, only women, children, and elderly. Thanks to my brother's connections, my mother and sister succeeded in getting on an army truck, and all the children and myself got in the car with my brother. We had trouble keeping up with other trucks because the road was very rough, and he had a small car. The army vehicles were all-terrain vehicles and they drove much faster. We tried to keep up, but when we came to one intersection, we didn't see the direction the convoy took, and we got lost. We took the wrong way, and that was scary. We drove and drove for hours. There was only forest everywhere, a deep gully on one side and a sky above us. Children got sick in the car. My brother didn't sleep for days and I was so afraid that he might lose control over the car and we would end up in this deep gully. We didn't know where we were, we didn't know what was the time, and I was concerned for my mother because she would be very worried if we didn't show up.

After 5-6 hours of driving we reached the asphalt road. After another hour driving on that asphalt, four civilians with guns suddenly jumped from the bush in front of our car. I could tell from my brother's face that he was very scared. They started asking questions like who we were, where we were going. As luck had it, somebody from behind said my brother's last name. My brother played drums and this man remembered seeing him at one of the parties. I would never forget the sign of relief on my brother's face, the smile and happiness. They asked my brother for a cigarette, and as bewildered as he was, he gave them a whole box. They said we were extremely lucky to be alive if we had come that way we did. We explained that we got lost, and they said that we were unbelievably lucky to have made it.

On one side, we felt really happy that we were safe and sound after traveling that road, but on the other side, we were worried how was my brother going to make it back. With a help of army phone lines, we found out when that same convoy we lost was going back and my brother succeeded in joining them and going back home. I also found my mother and we took a bus to my mother's aunt who invited us to her home in Serbia.

My husband stayed with my brother but he didn't want to fight and he sat at home. After some time, some people started having trouble with him sitting at home, while all other men had to go to the army lines. Zdravko talked to Dragan and said that it was not safe anymore to stay there, and they arranged to transfer Dragan to my mother's apartment. From there he was supposed to go to the little town where his father was born. This town was entirely Croat populated. He succeeded going through all army lines, nobody fired at him and then my mother's neighbors, Muslims, helped him to get to

the town where his brother was. After all this, Dragan made decision to go back to our home.

That was the last time I talked to Dragan. I was already in Serbia, and he went back to our house. He told me than that he had asked his colleague in Serbia, a director of a company my husband had a business relationship with, to help us out in any way he could. After this, the phone lines were cut off and I didn't talk to him for a year and a half. I didn't know whether he was alive or dead, and where he was. I didn't know anything about whereabouts of my husband.

This director helped us out a lot. He found a job for my sister and me in a local store. We worked different shift so one of us was always with children so that my mother was not alone with them. He also managed to find a daycare for our children, so they would have some activities and be able to play with other children. All the workers from his company collected money and bought food and clothes for us. We had enough food for 6 months. We also received a fantastic humanitarian help from the town. These were all high quality domestic products that people with good salaries could often not afford. All seasonal fruits, vegetables, fresh meat, salami, you name it, and all of this in high quantity. We even helped some local families in need. We had good paychecks, and it was peace there, that was all right, but I constantly expected to go home soon. I still could not comprehend that there was a real war and that war was going to last. I couldn't find out anything about my husband, and I became absent minded and distracted, I could not sleep, I could not concentrate on the job with customers. Then when I got back from work, my children would cry, especially my older daughter who was very close to her father. I would sit with them on the floor and hold them both. With time, my mother's

aunt became very nervous because we were there. Everything was getting on her nerves, so the children were whispering rather than talking with normal tone. We realized that we had to leave this house. The children did not want to stay there anymore.

We found out that there was a collective accommodation for refugees in the southern Serbia. Three hotels, usually used for winter and summer tourism, were available for refugees' accommodation. We all decided to go there, my mother, my sister, our children and I.

It was a late summer and early fall of 1992 when we got there. The weather was beautiful and at first we had a nice time there. The children had activities and they started school. However, the real fall was more threatening up in the mountains with heavy winds and rain. The closest populated place was 10 km from there. There were 400 women, children, and elderly in those 3 hotels.

In each room there were 20 people of all ages, and we all shared one bathroom. Young children would cry. Older people would walk around the room entire nights; they couldn't sleep as everybody left somebody behind in the war. People left their closest family in the war. We had 3 meals and there was enough food. We got milk from the village. Farmers didn't want to take money from us so we offered help to harvest corn. We became very close with these people, and on weekends we would get together with them. My sister and I were chosen to distribute humanitarian help to all people and also to work for the Red Cross. I had always known how to cut hair and I did this for people in the hotels. They would give me cigarettes so we didn't have to buy them. My children also distinguished themselves in school and all activities.

There was always someone who wouldn't leave us alone. There was a woman who I believe was jealous that we were so involved and skilled in many different things. She was romantically involved with a hotel manager and she told him that my husband was a Croat. One day, at lunchtime, when everybody was there, he addressed everybody. He said that he had learned that some of us had husbands and fathers who were not in the Serb army. He didn't say my name but he looked in my direction. Then the problems started. Other children were bullying my children by saying that their father was "Ustaša". Those were children from more rural areas and they probably heard that from their parents. My older daughter withdrew, my mother cried a lot after this; it was even harder to be with those 20 people in the same room under these circumstances. One night I couldn't sleep so I went outside around 2 am. I heard footsteps behind and there was this woman who didn't really communicate with anyone. She said to me that she knew how I felt as her husband was a Croat as well. She did not tell anyone. I did not either, but people somehow found out. She cried and said that she couldn't stay with her relatives in Serbia because they couldn't tolerate to have her staying with them while her husband might have been fighting for Croats.

Because of this, we decided to go back to Bosnia. We had a train at 2 am to the big city. I remember it was very cold, and my daughter had 40° Celsius fever. But we had to leave on that train. The crowd was enormous; we struggled to get on. In the big Serbian city, a cousin waited for us and we stayed in her apartment. We stayed there a few days, enough to take my daughter to the doctor. We registered as refugees and got some food and even some money.

And then back to Bosnia. It was October 1993. We took a bus to the small Serb town at the outskirts of a big Bosnian city where we slept in a school gym. We were lucky to meet an acquaintance of mine. He transported coal on one of three army trucks to one of the suburbs that was along our way. There was a terrible commotion there, people and refugees everywhere. People were trying to get to places and this was a rare opportunity for transportation. It was not easy to get on those trucks because lots of people were trying to find any kind of transportation, so my mother and my daughter were pushed on one truck and the rest of us went with the other. I wasn't sure if my mother saw that my daughter was on the same truck and I was worried that my daughter would get lost in all that commotion. It was risky to travel that route because the sniper was shooting, and maybe that is why our truck went the other way. We got stuck with the truck and it took us 9 hours to get there. The other two trucks probably got there in an hour or two.

When we got finally to that place, it was very dark because there was no electricity anywhere. I cried without stopping because I wasn't sure that my child was with my mother. We checked the police, because my mother might have talked to them, but learned nothing. We were standing there not knowing how to get from there to my sister's house. Then we noticed a young man walking toward us and calling my sister's name. He told us that he was actually waiting for the bus, which was really hard to believe because there were no electricity, no nothing, and yet the bus was operating. It looked unreal. But it did come.

The driver overheard my sister talking about my mother and my daughter, and he remembered driving them a few hours ago. He said that girl was around 9 years old and

she was saying that she didn't have a mother or father. I knew then that was my daughter. When we reached my sister's house, my daughter was exhausted and was already sleeping. I came to her and stroked her forehead gently and said "Mia honey mama is here". Everybody was crying. My sister's father in law couldn't stop crying. He couldn't believe that we came back when it was the worst war in Bosnia. That was actually when I understood that this was a real war.

I could have stayed at my sister's place, but I preferred being with my brother because he was alone. At that time, he actually went to Serbia to see his children who were sheltered there, and then a cousin offered us to stay with her until he comes back. She fed the army in her house. My children and I kept crying and she was trying to comfort me. She was saying that if my husband were killed I would have heard that for sure because "good news travel fast but bad even faster". Soldiers who ate there gave all fruit and sweets to my kids. They all knew my husband, as they were local people. They loved my daughters, especially the younger one who was always asking questions nobody could answer.

When my brother returned from Serbia, he was stunned to find us there. He cried too. He couldn't believe that we would come back then when it was the most difficult time in Bosnia. Staying in his house was horrific. Nobody was around; everything was abandoned. He went every night to the army line, and every morning around 2-3 am he would quickly visit us to make sure we were all right. There was a constant fire from both sides, we couldn't get outside either during the day or night and children did not stop crying. However, when they would get too tired they would simply fall asleep. I

couldn't sleep. I never know where I found the strength. I tried to sleep but my eyes would not close.

One day I heard that a cousin was going to a place close to where my house was. This is when I decided to go back to my house, which was on a Croat side of the city. I asked her to lend me 20 Deutsche marks so I could pay my cousin to drive me. I couldn't endure like that any more. I couldn't go on like that anymore. I didn't know if my husband was alive, nor did I have a house anymore. But I wanted to go. I was hoping that my husband was still in our house, or his uncles might have been there, or I would find somebody to tell me any news about my husband. I couldn't get over the bridge, but I went to my husband's cousin who lived on a Serb side of the neighborhood. She was married to a Muslim, who had always been a wonderful man, before the war and during the war. Because he lived on a Serb side of a city, he didn't go anywhere; he was inside the entire time. When you have a different religion in that situation, anybody can come and harass you. When he saw me at the door with my kids, he couldn't believe his eyes. He was truly happy to see us, and yelled to his wife to run to see who was at the door. They couldn't believe that we came back to Bosnia at that time.

Two days and nights we talked without stopping. They told me that Dragan was in our house, and also all his uncles and aunts. Over the bridge, there were all Croats houses, a little bit of Serbs and Muslims. That was hard for me. If he only knew that we were there, he could have walked to the bridge, and I would be able to wave at him from the balcony. But 2 km from the bridge, the sniper was operating and nobody went there.

I went to the company I worked for to say that I was back. I was afraid to greet people because I didn't know how would they react. I always waited for somebody to

greet me first. Dragan's secretary was happy to see me. She said that since this damned war started two of us were on her mind, because I was a Serb and Dragan was a Croat. She was wondering if we were together, if we had problems. She couldn't even think of a situation that Dragan was separated from the children. Usually, when he would come to the office in the morning, his topic was his girls. He talked about them so much as if nobody else had children. She gave me several paychecks and vacation money that I never received from the previous year. I returned 20 Deutsche marks I borrowed earlier.

I was still staying with Dragan's cousin and her husband. We shared everything we had. After 4-5 days, I heard that some sort of a big attack would happen. And it really did. That was unbelievable, 4 days and 4 nights shelling and gunfire didn't stop. 5 tanks were located in front of that apartment building where we were staying and all 5 were firing in direction of my house and my neighborhood. I knew that my husband was there, and his uncles, whoever, people were there, all the same 4 nights and 4 days the shelling and gunfire did not stop. After all this madness finally stopped, on the 5th day people didn't know where they were going. There was an army police standing just before the bridge and controlling movement of people across. They let people out, but nobody was allowed to go in from this side of the bridge. As luck had it, I met a policeman who came to visit his wife in the refugee hotels in Serbia. He couldn't believe that I came back. I said to him to let me go to my home. And he did, but he told me not go in because sometimes people when they had to leave their homes leave explosives and bombs behind.

I would never forget that feeling when I went over the bridge and when I was walking toward my house. I felt as if the wind was carrying me. What I saw was

horrific. Everything was in ruins, destroyed, demolished. I could see houses burned down, smoke coming from them, but our house still stood upright just as if God saved it. Everything on the house was wide open; people were going in taking things out. Oh my God, dead people lay on the street, such a chaos, but I was going and not looking I just wanted to come home. In all that chaos, you just didn't know who was going where and what people were carrying, I could see people running, screaming, crying, some carrying what ever they could on their backs, other pushing wheelbarrows, my God, I came to my house, the door wide open on the both floors. In that situation, when some people were running away and others were coming in robberies occurred.

All Croat and Muslim citizens were taken to the local school. There were buses for whoever wanted to leave to neighboring Croat held territory, and who thought he could stay, he stayed. Only some older people decided to stay, all younger people left. I went to that school and found Dragan's uncles. The oldest uncle, who lives now in northern Europe with his son, started crying. He couldn't believe that I came back and brought children with me to this madness. He said to me " Why did you come back? Why did you bring the children back? We thought you were safe, now is the worst time since the war started!" They told me that my husband ran away the first day when the attack began to a Muslim-Croat part of the city.

I tried to save as many things as I could, others' and mine. I left things in friends' houses, whoever I knew stayed on the Serb part of the city. I was afraid that others would take everything from my house. I don't know where I found the strength to move all those machines, furniture, and clothes. I literally lifted a washing machine, put it on a wheelbarrow and took it to my friends' house. I would stay during the day in the house,

and with the first dusk I would go over the bridge to Dragan cousin's house. I would push a wheelbarrow full of things bended down while I heard bullets flying over my head. I had a wood stove in my house. I cooked meals and took it with me to others at the nighttime. There was no electricity or water.

We had a big yard behind our house, 1,400 square metres, with fruit trees, apples, pears, you name it. Dragan made lots of jams as if he had known that we would come back. Dragan was in charge of distributing humanitarian aid to people so he had oil, sugar, flour so he was able to make jam. Also he planted vegetables, carrot, cabbage, and cauliflower. I had to cut all of these and hid it in our basement because people were stealing food. I also had meat. My friend's stepfather smuggled meat and she would give me fresh veal, beef, and pork.

My neighborhood was now part of Serb held territory. People went to work, but also men kept the lookout on the lines. This friend of mine who gave me meat didn't know where her husband was either. She heard that my husband spent some time with her husband in the city after my husband fled the house. We heard there was a wire left hanging down from a pole in a neighboring area. Apparently, if you brought your phone you could connect it to this wire and you could phone in the city. When we arrived there, a wait line was already formed. We hid behind the old fridge because the sniper fired at the line. We phoned her husband and he gave us a phone number where I could reach Dragan. From the city, he went to his relatives who lived in the Croat held town. I dialed the number but nobody was answering. I thought that my friend didn't write the good number. Just then, Dragan's cousin answered the phone. I asked for him, and she didn't ask who was it or anything. I just said "Daddy is that you". He used to call me

differently every day, so he said to me “is that you Roso” and started crying. We lost the connection and we didn’t say anything to each other. Tomorrow we went again to this wire to phone and this time he was more ready to talk. He was very surprised that I was in the house. He asked if I were scared to be there.

The spring came and I decided to stay in my house over the night as well because it was getting warmer. Beside my kids and me, only one other woman was there in her house. Nobody else. Even though everything was as it was, children were happy to be back in their home. They slept well. I was happy because I knew that Dragan was alive and I felt strength to live and to be in my house. This woman had asked me to give her one child to sleep with her, and at first I did. Then I realized that somebody could come at night and kill both her and my child so I took my child back. I offered her to be with us in my house but she didn’t want to leave her house. When the nights came, it was really dark because we didn’t have electricity. There was no glass on any window, only nylon with lots of holes. I would cover us with all blankets I had in the house but still I could scoop ice from the blankets. It was still cold. I couldn’t find a water pump anywhere, that was all stolen so I had trouble finding water to wash clothes. I would be inside my house with my children and people would come, look through things, and take what they needed. I could not convince them that was my house. Nobody believed that I actually lived there with children because it was a ruin. One day a woman, refugee from another town, came in. She took the freedom to look through my girls’ clothes and she took everything with hangers. At the same time, a man came in and he took the table. He just put it on his head and carried it out. I said to them that was mine and they didn’t believe it. Than I luckily found one photo with my children to show them. I would find

my photos on the street, because people would take something from one house and they would decide they didn't like it or they would find something more suitable in another house and they would just leave things on the street. I felt for one young soldier. He was also a refugee from another town. He had a 9-year-old daughter at the time and she didn't have any clothes. He asked me if I could give him some of my older daughter's clothes, and I did because he actually asked me. I gave him some of Dragan's clothes as well because this young soldier didn't have anything.

I was scared at night, because different armies would go by and they knew that these were Croat houses. Local people knew Dragan and me, but soldiers from other towns didn't. One day, a soldier came and wanted to take away a circular saw that belonged to my godfather who lived next door. My younger 8-year old daughter saw that and didn't let him take it. She said to him that belonged to her uncle and he couldn't take it. I was in the kitchen and I could hear them talking. Then he asked her where was her dad. I almost passed out. I thought if she said that her father was a Croat, God knows what would happen to us. But she was very clever; she said that her father was wounded and that he was in a Serb hospital. To my amazement, she added that I phoned him on that wire and he was doing well. After this, everybody left us alone. When soldiers went by my house, if they saw my girls outside, they would give them cigarettes for me so I had something to smoke. Even though, I didn't like my girls to be outside because there was a sniper shooting from a nearby refrigerator plant.

In March of 1994, my children and I decided to leave the house and go to be with Dragan. We needed proper papers in order to leave the Serb side and go to the Croat side. I was concerned that I might run into problems there because people in the

municipality office knew that my husband was a Croat and that he was not with us. They assumed that he fought for the Croat Army. I didn't know anything about that and I couldn't tell them what I didn't know. In any event, they let us go. The Serb policeman on the border told me to go down the path and I would eventually see the Croat ramp. As I was walking down that path, I was aware of the spring sunshine, I heard birds singing, I was ecstatic. I am certain that this was the happiest day in my life. We walked for 15-20 minutes and I still didn't see any ramp. In a second, panic came over me because I thought that maybe somebody was looking at me right then ready to shoot from both sides or maybe that policeman lied to me. The path curved in one section, and around the corner I saw the Croatian flag, ramp, and my husband who was walking up and down with his head down. We were late 2 hours because the bus ran late and he probably thought that we wouldn't show up. When my daughters saw their dad, they started running. They were expecting us. This was the first time we met after one year and a half. He didn't know who to embrace first, children or me. Everybody was crying, policemen, soldiers, his cousin, and us. His cousin drove the car, and I sat beside her, and Dragan sat with girls at the back. He held the girls, and put his hand around me on the first seat.

The girls asked their dad to buy them bananas. That was something unbelievable, on the Croat side as if there were not war at all. There was abundance of food and everything else, and Dragan's cousin bought the whole bunch of bananas for my girls. It was hard for me to believe this because we just left the war torn city behind us. This was only 10 km away from the total destruction. We were given a vacation home to use and we planted a garden and plowed the soil. Then I went by foot through the forests and

mine fields back again to recover all my things that I left with my friends. I brought everything but the washing machine; I just couldn't carry it that far on my back. We also got a cow from the town and I had to learn how to attend the cow. Unfortunately, in a few months, unrest started between Croats and Muslims. My husband had to go to the army lines. Of course, refugees were first sent to fight, not local people. The good thing for families was that these lines were far away, about 10 km, from where we lived, so it was much easier than at my house where the line was 100 m from the house.

Everybody there was kind to me. They knew I was a Serb but nobody ever offended me in any way. These people were noble. I got so close with them that I felt I wasn't born and raised where I was but I felt very attached to this area where we spent the last years of war. When I first went back to Bosnia from Canada, I spent more time in this place than with my brother and sister.

After the war was over, I managed to get help and repair the first floor of our house so we could move in. According to Dayton agreement, this area, where my house was, fell under the Muslim government. We tried to go back, but Dragan couldn't get a job. Besides, I was a Serb and my husband was a Croat, and everybody was expected to stick with his or her own people. My children were constantly asked about my husband's and my ethnic background. My older daughter became withdrawn. My husband was trained and worked as an engineer for many years before the war, now he had to work in a sawmill as a laborer. Nothing else was available. In this situation, we decided that we didn't have any other option but to leave. We applied for Australia and got rejected, and then we applied for Canada and got approved.

We came to Canada 10 years ago, in April of 1999. We asked for Toronto, as Dragan had cousins there, however, we ended up getting Vancouver. All those things that I carried across mine fields on my back, I sold for 500-600 dollars. The Canadian government gave us a loan of 10,000 dollars to get tickets, visas, and other travel related expenses. So when we first got here, we had already a large debt.

The voyage to Canada was very stressful for me. My older daughter, at that time 14, cried inconsolably. She did not want to go. For check in, they didn't let me to take with me my personal baggage. I tried to explain that in that small suitcase I had all my documents, but this man did not want to talk to me. There was no name on the suitcase and I thought I would loose it for sure.

When we arrived to Vancouver, they put us in Welcome house. I did not like it there. I was terrified that we had to share that apartment with somebody else I didn't know. They gave us than another apartment where we would be alone but I had to use the bed from the balcony. The woman who worked there was explaining something to me in English even though I couldn't understand one word. I studied Russian in school. We had 3 bottles of slivovitz with us and I spent all of it on cleaning bathtub, doorknobs, and sinks. My family had to walk around the city until I was done. Then a man came to pick up somebody who came from Bosnia as well, and he upset me a lot. He said to us that we were not aware where we brought our children. There is drugs and prostitution everywhere. If I had money at that moment, I would have gone back. I was terrified, I didn't even cry anymore, I bawled.

One Bosnian woman helped us to do all banking documentation and other things. She advised us on where to live for the first while. She suggested a building where

already some of our people lived, where school was close, and ESL classes were close for my husband and me. I did not go to look for anything. I didn't feel like it. Dragan and girls looked for a place, I didn't. I sat and cried. I brought with me dishes from Bosnia, and I went to the store and bought beans, meat and flour. I baked my own bread, and one man from Bosnia who was replacing the manager in our building smelled it and knocked at the door. I gave him to eat as much as he desired.

Our people, who lived here already for some time, drove me crazy. Everybody was telling me different things. I had a feeling that I didn't have a head anymore; it felt as if I had rocks in my head. I guess it was from sleeplessness, and constant crying. I was so scared for my daughters. In the morning, I accompanied them to the school, but I couldn't make it in the afternoon. After 3 levels of English, Dragan got a job for 9 dollars an hour in a factory. He was able to find work to operate CNC machines. I didn't work the first year, and then I cooked for a Philippine woman, and cleaned her three houses, and then I didn't want to do this anymore. I found a job in a poultry factory. I worked there for 5 years until my arms gave up on me and I went on disability.

I am not happy here. I know that my children will not have to work as hard as we had to. We do it for them so they would have a better life, even though I don't see a great perspective even for them. They don't have freedom to go out at any time anywhere like we could do in our old country. I am sad that girls don't have any place to go for entertainment that doesn't involve alcohol and drugs. Maybe that is what I see here around me in this surrounding where poor people live. Maybe it is better where rich people live. There are no Balkans anywhere; you cannot find Balkan soul anywhere. I feel here like a slave, I worked from dusk to dawn. I see that society gives us different

opportunities, to go to school, to get a loan. But this is a hard life. We should not have done this. We did not need this. I went to school in Bosnia, and I built my house while my kids were little. I went to work every day, but it wasn't hard for me, it wasn't stressful for me. I lived and I was happy. I don't like to live here, I will never like it, I am here only because of my children. If my kids could have a life that we had before the war, I would go back instantly. I don't like to breathe this air; I don't like to be here, I don't see anything beautiful here. I mean it is beautiful, but for me the most beautiful is over there. The most backward village with no electricity and no water is more beautiful to me. I don't like socializing here. My children don't like that I don't go anywhere, I just sit at home.

Even more distressing is to see our young generation becoming similar to everybody around. They don't know their mother tongue anymore. Why don't Canadians learn any other languages? You know, people tell me I have a heavy accent. Sure I do, but I still can speak several languages, while my older daughter's boyfriend, who is a Canadian, has been with her for 4 years and he can't say a word in our language. That is sad.

I became withdrawn. I changed. I was a person who was responsible for a good atmosphere at every party. I loved get-togethers and sports, volleyball especially. Nothing can lift my spirit here. I only go where I have to go. When I worked in the factory, I had to get out of the house. Now, I don't work anymore, so I don't go anywhere. When I get up in the morning, I clean the house a little bit, and then sit on the couch the whole day alone. I don't visit my neighbors. There are a few of our people in my neighborhood right now. I don't feel like talking, I am tired of talking; I am tired if I

have to say something or ask. I don't like when somebody visits, I don't feel like making that coffee for anybody and talking to anybody. I just don't feel like it. I feel like sitting on the couch alone the whole day. We have some Bosnian friends who have camping equipment and they call us all the time to go with them. At first, I didn't want to offend them so I went along. I stopped doing that. I say to my husband to go without me, I don't want to go to spoil their good time. He goes Fridays and come back Sundays. I find all that really tiring to go anywhere.

I was here for 8 months when my mother died. I didn't have money to go to the funeral. When I was leaving she told me "You are going to stay a little while and you will come back, are you?" My father died as a young man of 41. I have a brother and a sister, I miss their children immensely and I miss my brother enormously. There is no night when I don't think about those kids and think if they had enough to eat that day. I know that this is not good but I cannot help it. I try hard to put a happy face for my husband; I don't want him to worry about me.

My husband is different. He doesn't talk; he holds everything inside. I try to be happier for him. But you know, when I go somewhere on a sky train, I sit down and cry. I cry for every child's birthday, for every anniversary of my parents' death. Here, the relationships are different. My daughter's boyfriend went to another province for three months and his parents didn't even come to drive him to the airport. I am afraid when Dragan and I die tomorrow, what will happen to my children. They will have no one here.

My husband says he wouldn't go back. He says that he would go further to Australia and even further where there is no phone. He says he is tired of life; he doesn't

need family or anybody. I don't know if he drew the line and never talks about anything from the past. He never talks about our house, like to comment when somebody has something that we used to have in our house. He never talks about it. When we came at first, we liked to hear our language and get together with people, but than that damned politics starts. He doesn't like to go where people talk about politics, about war, who is guilty, who started. When that starts, he touches my hand as a sign to get ready to leave. I don't think he minds if somebody calls him "ustaša" but he doesn't like to talk about it, and he doesn't like to listen about it. He was brought up the same way as I did. There were lots of mixed marriages in his family and they never offended each other, they actually never talked about it. Our people here are nice and kind, but when there are gatherings; everybody calls their own kind.

I talked to people in other provinces, and it seems that our people mix more in other provinces. It seems to me that our people are divided ethnically more here then elsewhere. My younger daughter had several Croatian boyfriends. As soon as they learned that her mother was a Serb, the relationship was over. My older daughter has a Canadian boyfriend. Even if we want to go back, we couldn't because my older wouldn't go back and we couldn't leave her here alone.

I still believe that my children are satisfied here. As far as I am concerned, I am not hungry, and I am not on the street. We still made something for these 10 years in Canada. We put our kids through school, and none of them had any loans, we paid for everything, so they can have a fresh start. I came here when I was over 40, and I couldn't go to school again because I needed to put my children through school. My husband didn't have time to verify his degree because he had to work right away to provide for us.

We don't have any savings and we haven't bought a property. But to me that is not so important. I value that the place where I live is clean and that my children eat healthy food.

I had a house in Bosnia; I was happy and content. Look at my life now, I worked hard to build something over there, we lost everything and I had to come here in my 40's to start again, to learn English, to do the worst jobs. I am not young anymore, I cannot learn and remember as before. When I think about this war, about the misery it brought upon us, and that all that was for nothing, all those kids on all three sides died for nothing.

Everything is different here from what I thought it would be. Actually, I didn't think much, I was happy to put my kids through school and for them not to fear because their parents don't have the same ethnicity and religion. I hoped that they would have a normal life like we had before, when we all lived together and loved one another, visited one another, and never asked about ethnicity. I was born like that, I live like that, and I will die like that. To this day, I still have the same amount of Muslim friends as before, not because I have a mixed marriage, but because I was brought up like that, to love all people. Of course, I have two daughters and they are not the same, so I don't expect that all these Muslims are the same, or all Croats, or that all Serbs are not good. I still think that there are good people on all sides.

Impact of event scale scoring results

The total score on the Impact of Event Scale reflects the overall impact of the event. The higher the score the more stressful impact. The maximum score is 75. There are two subscales: the intrusive subscale with range of scores from 0 to 35, and the avoidance subscale with range of scores from 0 to 40. The sum of these two subscales is the total stress score. The cut-off point is 26. Scores higher than this indicate moderate to severe impact, scores that range from 9 to 25 indicate mild to moderate impact, and scores below 8 are subclinical. In this study, 4 participants had very high scores that show the high event impact. The total scores were 63,61, 55,41 and one participant had a subclinical score of 4. These results indicate that 90% of this sample has PTSD like symptoms.

Well-being question

At the end of every interview, I asked my participants the well-being question, “Where do you find yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 as far as your well-being is concerned?” The answers I got were 5,5,6,6, and 7. These results would indicate that these people are average in their life satisfaction. This clearly does not match the participants’ narratives where a high level of distress is pronounced.

Social desirability might have played a role in answering this question, because I was left with an impression that they didn’t want to be perceived as low in life satisfaction, regardless of the story they just shared with me. I believe it is a part of these people’s culture. They do not want to be classified or designated in any way as weak and they do not want to be perceived as victims. Tatjana said, “I am around 6, well, maybe 7, so you wouldn’t think I am so miserable.” Zdravka’s daughter just came in as we were

finishing this interview, and Zdravka was probably influenced with her daughter presence in answering this question. In addition to this, in hindsight, it might have been better if I had asked separate questions for physical and emotional well-being. In this way, the answers might have been more descriptive of my participants' true-life condition.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Across narrative themes

As I transcribed and translated all the interviews myself (other than 10 pages that were part of my first interview which was translated by a professional translator), I got to know the interview data by heart. After going over the stories so many times, the shared themes among participants and also what was particularly important for each participant became obvious. In my analysis, there were three periods. These were the war period, the exile period, and the resettlement period. There were several important themes across each of these periods as shown in Table 2. I describe these themes in the pages that follow.

Period	Narrative Theme
The War Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shattered assumptions • Witnessing destruction and death
The Exile Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmare-like state • Oh no, they will stay forever! • Guilt for running away • Survival struggle
The Resettlement Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural shock and discrimination • Walking shells • Negative psychological effects • Dreaming of return

Table 2. Themes across narratives

Consequences of multiple traumas – evidence of continuing distress

Enduring distress

Posttraumatic stress disorder is a complex disorder that develops when traumatic life experiences overwhelm people's capacity to cope with these life experiences. All aspects of human living are affected by this disorder, from biological and psychological to social aspect of living, and this contributes to complexity of this condition. People who get exposed to trauma often suffer permanent neurobiological changes that might cause permanent hyperarousal that results in sleep and concentration problems. In addition to this, after being exposed to trauma, people might develop negative personality changes, like increased suspiciousness, feelings of emptiness or hopelessness, impulsivity and constant anxiety (Wortman, 2004). Throughout the interviews and after analyzing the participants' stories, it became obvious that all of my participants have been suffering from some of the above-mentioned instances of psychological distress. Also, the very high IES scores indicate that almost all participants have PTSD symptoms of intrusion and avoidance.

The distress started with the outbreak of the war, 17 years ago in a form of *shattered assumptions*. People did not believe there would be a war in the first place and also they believed, once they decided to leave and find a shelter, they would be back home shortly. How could they imagine they would never go back home again!

Nikola

My father, whom I regard a rational man, did not believe that war would come to our town... Most of the things I took with me were books because my father advised me to keep studying and not get too relaxed until the whole thing had blown over.

Dijana

There was shelling and we had to go to the basement, but I still didn't believe that it would actually be the real war... My father said we should leave for a little while with kids until this calms down.

Tatjana.

My parents didn't think anything would happen at home. My brother, who was 26 at the time, did not think anything would happen either... I only had a little backpack and books because I thought I was going for about 10 days to study for the exam and I would be back.

Zdravka

All of a sudden, there was a rapid fire from a machine gun and I thought I was dreaming. We heard that barricades were on the roads so it was not possible to get through. Neighbors started organizing themselves for patrols to protect houses. After 4-5 days, I still expected that this would eventually calm down... I thought I would buy something for about 10 days until this craziness was over.

This distress continued in exile where most participants had trouble understanding what was happening and were in a *nightmare-like state*. The exile looked unreal. The life was put on hold, until the situation at home resolves somehow. Also throughout the exile, participants lived with fear because they were uncertain about survival of their immediate family they left behind.

Tatjana

All this seemed unreal to me. I could not believe that this was happening to me, in my own life, especially because I left behind my closest family...It was a complete chaos. People were completely lost. The whole situation we were in was surreal. People were looking for a way out of this chaos, for a way to forget.

The most difficult period in my life started when phone connections were cut off...I did not have any news about my family. This was horrific. My brother was 26 and I thought he was mobilized for sure to fight in the war. Then the news on TV and in the newspapers was all about terrible happenings in my hometown. Mass killings of Serbs, concentration camps, like 5,000 Serbs closed in a soccer stadium in wire, mass rapes and other horror stories. This war propaganda was well and alive on all sides but in my case hit me especially hard because I did not have any way to contact my family. I simply did not know if they were alive and what happened to them. This is when my insomnia started.

Nikola

It was kind of unreal. All of a sudden, overnight, I found myself in another city... I then started thinking about what was going to happen to my mom and dad because we started receiving increasingly grim news about the killings and disappearances of Serbian civilians. The inner tension was rising.

It was really hard after the phone lines were cut off because we heard about bombs going off and killing large number of people, and we thought: "Oh my God, are they [parents] among the victims?" The hardest thing for me was when a bomb exploded at the farmers' market. I tuned into a radio station and listened to the list of the names of 150 people killed in the attack. I was afraid I would hear their names – I would have died if I did – but fortunately, they were not among the casualties. They were alive.

Zdravka

...I constantly expected to go home soon. I still could not comprehend that there was a real war and that war was going to last. I couldn't find out anything about my husband, and I became absent minded and distracted, I could not sleep, I could not concentrate on the job with customers. Then when I got back from work, my children would cry, especially my older daughter who was very close to her father. I would sit with them on the floor and hold them both.

This experience of prolonged fear and for men also feelings of *guilt for running away* might have set the stage for experiencing later psychological problems. Both male participants in this group felt guilt. They were also ashamed for not fighting in Bosnia.

Nikola

I must admit I felt ashamed and guilty a little that I was there, safe, hanging around, having a good time while at the same time young men were fighting in Bosnia and Krajina. Especially because I had relatives in villages who had to fight. I would imagine often being confronted by the army police, somewhere on the street, who would send me back to Bosnia. I always imagined myself not resisting but accepting to go.

Borisa

Among men, I felt they considered me a deserter. They thought that my place was in Bosnia where I should defend my people. It was my decision more than my wife's to go back. We went back on August 3rd or 4th of 1992.

Additionally, participants' problems were compounded with their relatives' increasing intolerance. In addition to feelings of fear and guilt, there was a feeling of

being a burden to their relatives who, after some time, lost their patience with refugees. Human good will only goes so far, and generally people are more ready to help if those that need help are far away from them (van der Kolk). All participants experienced problems when staying with relatives because it was alright to stay a little while, but then fear came that “*Oh no, they [the refugees] will stay forever!*” Then the home was missed terribly.

Nikola

A minor crisis broke out when we had to leave our uncle's place. My aunt just couldn't handle this any longer. She asked us if we had any other relatives to stay with.

Dijana

Even bigger problems started when my uncle came from Bosnia after 2 years of confinement there. He did not tolerate my kids and I to be with them. He thought we would stay forever.

Boriša

On top of this, we started feeling our relative's irritation with us. They could not bear any longer to have us at their place, and we felt that we were not welcome there anymore.

Tatjana

Along with all this, I had lots of trouble with my relatives, especially with my uncle, who was an alcoholic. It was very difficult for me to stay with them because they did not want me there. I felt like a burden. The whole situation did not have any end in sight. I heard all these stories how refugees from Bosnia and Croatia are to be blamed for all the hardships that people in Serbia have to endure, and because of refugees, Serbia suffers.

Zdravka

With time, my mother's aunt became very nervous because we were there. Everything was getting on her nerves, so children were whispering rather than talking with normal tone. We realized that we had to leave this house. Children did not want to stay there anymore.

Because of this, two of my participants decided to return to Bosnia. For those who returned to fight in the war and for those who returned to live in the war zone

Witnessing destruction and death were dreadful reality.

Boriša

Residents fled and left behind their property... People were grabbing everything; they were completely wrecking havoc on other people's property. They were taking doors, windows, hot water tanks, faucets, even dry wall paper, anything and everything.

Indeed, this action was fiery. I cannot even begin to describe the intensity of fire. We were firing through the small opening on the tank, and I had a hard time filling these frames with bullets that is how much ammunition we spent.

We routinely lost one or two men every month, and we would get new people. These were all young, very young men... These were very brave young men. Whenever I think of them, I can't stop my tears from rolling down.

Zdravka

That was unbelievable, four days and four nights shelling and gunfire didn't stop. Five tanks were located in front of that apartment building where we were staying and all five firing in the direction of my house and my neighborhood. I knew that my husband was there, and his uncles, whoever, people were there, all the same four nights and four days the shelling and gunfire did not stop.

Everything was in ruins, destroyed, demolished. I could see houses burned down, smoke coming from them, but our house still stood upright just as if God saved it. Everything on the house was wide open; people were going in taking things out. Oh my God, dead people lay on the street, such a chaos, but I was going and not looking I just wanted to come home. In all that chaos, you just didn't know who was going where and what people were carrying, I could see people running, screaming, crying, some carrying what ever they could on their backs, other pushing wheelbarrows, my God, I came to my house, the door wide open on the both floors. In that situation, when some people were running away and others were coming in, robberies occurred.

Other people struggled to carry on with their lives in exile. They exhausted all their resources trying to survive. There was no money, the hyperinflation was daunting, there was no work, food was scarce and shelter was not secure. Students tried to study,

mothers did their best to take care of their children, while refugees tried to support each other in face of overwhelming difficulties of *Survival struggle*.

Dijana

Whatever money I had I spent it all. The inflation was unbelievable. I would exchange in the morning 100 Deutsche marks and in the afternoon that would be nothing... I couldn't find any work, so I went with my aunt to pick apples, pears, or to dry plums during the nighttime. We needed any kind of work because we could not survive on our refugee help. Nobody asked me if I had money to pay the school photos for the girls... We didn't have any food or money for the most basic things. This was an absolutely horrible time.

Tatjana

I wanted to quit my studying because I did not have any money. However, everybody around me encouraged me to continue. My mother pleaded with me over the amateur radio not to quit. I simply did not have any money either for food or clothes. My boyfriend worked long hours, and it was a huge shock for me when he offered me financial help. I never thought I would be in a situation like this. I took the money but only when he said that I should not take it if I wouldn't be ready to do the same thing for him. My friend Diana, a Croat, who fled to Germany, had sent me 20 DM in a letter and some nice clothes. This meant a lot to me. I hardly had any clothes, and just the thought that she cared about me meant a lot.

After several years of ongoing war, participants realized that the war was not going to be over soon, and they started looking into their options. Options were not many, but one of them was to leave for one of the Western countries. It was, under the circumstances, relatively easy to get entry visas for most Western countries. This option looked like a viable one for most people, because the other countries, first of all, did not have a war. However, after initial excitement and high hopes, for most participants, difficult reality of different culture, language, and everyday life set in. Majority of participants experienced *cultural shock and discrimination* that added to their initial stress.

Boriša

I don't have anything in common with these people around me. I feel that I don't belong here, I am trying to adapt as much as I could, but I fear I will never be able to accept this culture. I can see from the behavior of people whose first language is English that they think that they are somehow above us. If I had stayed in Bosnia, I would not have lived through this cultural shock, and that feeling that people didn't care about me which is hard to take. I feel like a second order citizen here.

Nikola

These people from immigration played provocative movies for us, like Philadelphia, which is about homosexuals. We would get up, turned the TV off and cursed them for playing that movie for us.

It was shock to me when I went to a store and saw people with Down Syndrome working there. In the old country we did our best not to look at them, but then I realized we hid them from others, while here they tried to incorporate them into society.

I went to the store to buy a beer. It tasted horrible; it was root beer. In old country, alcohol is sold on the same shelf with fruit juices. I was surprised how conservative people here were about alcohol.

I was also dumbfounded by tabloids. I used to think that all newspapers were serious. Once I saw a newspaper headline at the beach saying that Nessie from Loch Ness had died, and I thought it was spectacular that they found Nessie in the first place. I was foolish enough to pay two dollars to read it. I didn't know any better.

Dijana

When we first came, I was happy to have ran away from that chaos over there, however, in a little while, when I saw this different system, that you have to take your kid to and from school every day, that you worry if somebody would steal your child, then I wondered if we did the right thing by coming to Canada. I wasn't sure anymore.

Zdravka

Then a man came [to Welcome House] to pick up somebody who came from Bosnia as well, and he upset me a lot. He said to us that we were not aware where we brought our children. There is drugs and prostitution everywhere. If I had money at that moment, I would have gone back. I was terrified, I didn't even cry anymore, I bawled.

Several participants mentioned the language and nation of origin discrimination. They felt they have been discriminated against because of where they came from and because of their accent. There are lots of prejudice around us, and even though, in present time, people are generally more aware of different cultures, the discrimination seems to be more subtle and it is more expressed in a tone of voice and body language rather than openly, but this certainly depends on the sophistication of a discriminator.

Nikola

One of the men that carried me on the stretcher asked me where I was from, and he did not seem OK with the fact that I lived in this building. He said there was a time when not everyone was allowed to live there. I thought I was dying, and he was giving me a hard time. It wasn't my fault that my rent was 650 dollars and that my welfare cheque allowed for that.

Boriša

People instantly change their facial expression when they realize you are an immigrant. The expression goes from a smile to a serious look saying "Oh there is another one who can't speak English, who knows where this one is coming from, another dirty immigrant." There is disgust on their faces. This might be my imagination, but I am certain that they are not glad to see me, or to talk to me or to relate to me in any way.

I feel cultural discrimination everywhere; I mean literally everywhere. They pay me less at my work because I don't have a Canadian degree. When I go with my daughter to soccer, if I say a word with my accent, everybody looks at me as if I came from Mars.

Zdravka

You know, people tell me I have a heavy accent. Sure I do, but I still can speak several languages, while my older daughter's boyfriend, who is a Canadian, has been with her for 4 years and he can't say a word in our language. That is sad.

Enduring feelings of fear, guilt, loss of community and country, and loss of support created context for development of *negative psychological effects*. All of my participants developed negative psychological effects because of their lived experiences and unfortunately, up to this date, these negative psychological effects are still present.

Participants explained how they have had to deal with constant anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and insomnia.

Boriša

I feel constant anxiety. I turned into a frightened animal that is scared of everything, from bank to my boss at work. I am a very nervous, miserable, and unhappy human being. I feel alone. Lonely, uncared for. I feel all by myself. I don't have nightmares like some of my friends I talk to, but I have a daily bad moments. Especially, when I have a break at my work, I spend that 1-hour break in thinking about my parents, brothers, friends, war, and then when it's time to go back to work, I don't feel I can work. I feel sick; I am preoccupied with these thoughts so I cannot go back to work. I feel I am wasting my energy; I feel tired, because I push myself. I have problems because of these events and I know that. I try to fight it; I still have energy to fight that, especially because now I have a child, job, and I am aware that I should stop thinking about these things and concentrate on present and future.

Dijana

I can't sleep at night, maybe because I think about how it was before when I used to work in Bosnia and about my friends. I don't have anything here. I feel I can't breathe and I have to open the window. I have a feeling I will suffocate.

Zdravka

I became withdrawn. I changed... I don't feel like talking, I am tired of talking. I am tired if I have to say something or ask. I don't like when somebody visits, I don't feel like making that coffee for anybody and talking to anybody. I just don't feel like it. I feel like sitting on the couch alone the whole day.

Nikola

I thought I was having a heart attack. I was doing some exercises, when I suddenly felt my heart pounding hard and unstopably. I was unable to calm down, my heart was pounding, and then I started to sweat. My friends called an ambulance. This was the first time when I had a panic attack.

Tatjana

From August to October, I did not have any news about my family. The phone connections were cut off. This was horrific. This is when my insomnia started. I could not sleep literally one entire month, maybe an hour per night. Unfortunately, up to this day, I still have trouble with sleeping.

Other evidence that these participants are psychologically distressed is the common finding of feeling emptiness. These people describe themselves like *walking shells*. People still live, work, do all things that people do, but they say they feel empty.

Nikola

I don't have anything here [in Canada]; I am here only physically.

Dijana

I don't know about other people, but my body is here [in Canada] and my thoughts are over there.

Boriša

There is emptiness in my entire soul, a drought.

Tatjana

Deep down in my soul there is emptiness and I cannot fill this void with anything.

As all of my participants are displaced people, they do not have a community and therefore, do not have a sense of home and grounding. They do not have a sense of belonging and connection to other people outside the immediate family. This contributed to pervasive feeling of emptiness. This is a reason for concern as a feeling of emptiness is closely related to feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and isolation and it predicts depression and suicide ideation (Klonsky, 2008).

Another sign of distress is living in dreams. *Dreaming of return* is a hope that if only they could return to the old country, happiness and inner peace would return as well. For mixed marriages, there is a reality of ethnic separation in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, and a difficult choice of where they would go if they decided to go back. Again, it is easier for people from Serbia, because they are returning to their cities, towns, and villages that are still there with the more or less the same people. When one is from Bosnia, everything is more complicated, because of extremely dramatic changes in

Bosnia. For these people, it seems that home is lost forever. Regardless, all participants talked about their dreams of return.

Nikola

But they [friends] got homesick, just like I am, and they are going back, so my wife will lose her best friend. My wish to go back is ever-present and I doubt it will ever go away. That is a burden for my whole family.

Dijana

I constantly go back in my dreams to how it was before in my life, only to 1992. I see myself at work, with my friends. I feel that all this is a dream, and I will go back to my city as it used to be. But there is no return, there is no return. Wishes and reality are not the same. I could not leave my children behind and I don't know where I would go either.

Boriša

Going back is a dream that will never go away. It is a reverie, similar when people daydream about winning a lottery. That is how I daydream what I would do if I went back. Everything is in weed now; nobody takes care of my father's land... The only reason for me to stay here is the future of my child.

Zdravka

I don't like to live here, I will never like it, I am here only because of my children. If my children could have a life that we had before the war, I would go back instantly. I don't like to breathe this air; I don't like to be here, I don't see anything beautiful here. I mean it is beautiful, but for me the most beautiful is over there. The most backward village with no electricity and no water is more beautiful to me.

Tatjana

I am satisfied with my life in Canada, but I am not happy. I don't feel that serenity that I feel when I sit in a café in Belgrade watching people go by. It just feels good to be around those people there. I feel grounded. I feel that I belong. I don't feel that here. I live, work, everything is normal and I am not miserable and unsatisfied but somehow there is a hollowness. I think I would be entirely happy if Dejan [husband] said we were going back to Belgrade to live there. I could work as a translator and I would love that. I would have time to read books; my mother would be close by, my aunt, my cousins. Then I would walk with my friends, go for coffee. I could leave my kids with grandma over the weekend.

Across the stories, themes of distress emerged. From the war period to resettlement period, there is convincing evidence that these participants have struggled

with negative psychological effects that resulted from living through extremely disrupting life events. These stories also illustrate that once people were physically safe and did not have to worry about surviving, negative psychological effects became more pronounced.

“As good as it gets”- PTG in Bosnian way

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) defined Posttraumatic growth as an experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly distressing and challenging life events. According to these authors, this positive change can manifest itself through increased appreciation of life, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and richer spiritual and existential life. In the stories of my participants, I did not find any evidence of any of these ways of growth. On the contrary, I found evidence that my participants might be actually worse off on all of these dimensions of posttraumatic growth.

For example, Zdravka finds that she enjoys her life less now than before the war and before she moved to Canada.

Zdravka

But this is a hard life. We should not have done this. We did not need this. I went to school in Bosnia, and I built my house while my kids were little. I went to work every day, but it wasn't hard for me, it wasn't stressful for me. I lived and I was happy. I don't like to live here, I will never like it, I am here only because of my children. If my kids could have a life that we had before the war, I would go back instantly. I don't like to breathe this air; I don't like to be here, I don't see anything beautiful here. I mean it is beautiful, but for me the most beautiful is over there. The most backward village with no electricity and no water is more beautiful to me. I don't like socializing here. My children don't like that I don't go anywhere, I just sit at home.

Further, participants do not seem to have more meaningful interpersonal relationships after experiencing trauma.

Tatjana

I miss my girlfriends with whom I grew up. We had this special relationship that I cannot find anywhere with anybody else. There was this unlimited trust and freedom between us. I knew I could tell them anything and they would be ok with that. Somehow I cannot find that here with anybody. I do have good friends here with whom I share good and bad things in our lives; however, I feel somewhat reserved and not entirely free with them. It could be that I am the problem. I might be asking for too much, and I want things to be perfect. I miss my family and stability they give me and I miss people.

Also, there is evidence of diminished rather than increased sense of personal strength.

Dijana

We are divorced now even though we still have a good relationship, and I still hope that he would come and live with us again. It is more because of our daughter so she can have a father. It is because of me too, I would have more support and I would be less scared. I am really scared that I will loose a job and I don't know what will happen to us then. I don't have anybody here. He is more practical than I am, he can figure out how to make money even if he doesn't have a job. I am not that skilled. If this company shuts down, I will not sleep again for nights and nights.

In addition, there is evidence that balance and well-being are missing in my participants lives, so there is no indication that they changed priorities and enjoy their lives more.

Boriša

Another problem now is that all I do is work. I don't have any other aspect of my living but work.

Lastly, this study found evidence that all these participants reported feeling empty and that is a sign that the spiritual and existential richness is lacking.

However, even though in this research study I found considerably more distress than signs of benefits, participants at some point acknowledged that they have accomplished something either professionally or helped their family members to achieve something or that they fared well considering the enormous life challenges that they were

faced with. Some of them were at the very bottom, and even though, life has been a struggle, they at least have shelter and food. They remember a time when that was not the case. However, this does not resemble what Tedeschi and Calhoun would call posttraumatic growth, and this cannot be considered a transformative positive psychological change. Rather, this represents more people coping with their circumstances the best they can.

Tatjana

I am satisfied with my life in Canada, I mean, I work, I live, but I am not happy... I don't feel grounded here. I envy people who accepted Canada as their home because we live here after all. I miss something. Everything is great here. We have lots of friends, and we get together with people and we travel but somehow deep down in my soul, there is emptiness. I cannot fill this void with anything. I miss my parents, my home. When I was growing up, I felt so secure, I had a beautiful childhood, and then suddenly I was ripped away from them. I am completely different person from who I was and from who I wanted to be. I am much more cynical than I would have ever been if I didn't have to live through all of this. I grew up over night.

Nikola

Ultimately, I am very happy how things turned out to be for us. If we had to live through this, we had incredible luck, fantastic luck.

Dijana

It was the hardest to live through the exile. At least, now I have a roof over my head, and I am not hungry. At least, we all have some kind of work.

Zdravka

As far as I am concerned, I am not hungry, and I am not on the street. We still made something for these 10 years in Canada. We put our kids through school, and none of them had any loans, we paid for everything, so they can have a fresh start.

Boriša

Past cannot be forgotten. It has been a continuous friction and an inside struggle, and it might never cease, even though time helps. I succeeded at least in some areas in Canada, I work as an engineer now, and I am becoming more content. But this has been so hard that I cannot put it in words.

In a way, this study confirms what Powell et al (2003) found in their quantitative study in Sarajevo. They found low to moderate levels of PTG depending on the age of the participants. They believed that the lower than other studies scores might not be attributed only to cultural differences existing before the war, but also to the fact that participants' micro and macrosystems have been changed or destroyed. Particularly, the 46-65 year old group showed low levels of perceived growth in this study. In this qualitative study, I also did not find evidence of positive psychological change in the aftermath of war, exile and resettlement. It might be that this concept of posttraumatic growth is culturally determined, and it might be more applicable to some other types of trauma (i.e. cancer patients).

Meaning making – or the lack of it?

From the literature, we know that the ability to create meaning in the face of adversity helps with better adjustment and psychological health. Also, failure to find meaning may result in elevated depression and intrusive thoughts (Wortman, 2004). Research has shown that social and cultural factors play an important role in meaning making. Social interaction, emotion and personal expression, and having opportunity to express one's experiences and having these experiences heard and acknowledged seem to be important for meaning making (Collie & Long, 2005).

For the participants in my study, these cultural and social factors might have hindered their meaning making process. When one cannot speak the language and when one feels isolated, how can one interact and express herself? For my participants, social interactions and personal expression were severely undermined because of this new context of living. Needless to say, this inability to meaningfully interact with others

added more stress to people's lives and this study confirms that. This study found evidence that younger participants who were more proficient in English language and who accepted what happened were better able to move ahead in their lives. The only participant who had a sub-clinical score on IES was the one who appeared to have made peace with what happened. This cannot be said for somewhat older participants. The struggle to make meaning out of what happened is still present and these participants seem to experience lots of distress as shown through their narratives and also through high scores on the IES.

Nikola successfully makes meaning of events by viewing the events in a larger context of history and time. As for the making meaning out of the event itself, he also seems to take clearly one side in the war conflict, and that helps him to make piece with it. Tatjana also, to some extent, has flexibility in her thinking to take more perspectives into account and that helps her to make some sense of events, her experiences, and her environment.

Nikola

Unfortunately, there are tremendous losses on all sides. It would be the best if we could go back to where we were born and had lived, but it can't be. And these people that are there now, they deserve to be there, everybody has to live and life goes on. It is a new era now. The city was different when we lived there, and it was different when the Turks or Austro-Hungarians were there, it is again a new era, different time.

Religion helped me to go through this...It led me consciously and subconsciously to understand my situation and to understand that there is no need to moan and groan.

I don't feel guilty for the war. Somehow I was always on the Serb side. I felt sorry for all civilians that suffered, of course, I will always be suspicious that things were as they are presented as we are the only guilty side. I will always doubt that, what can I do, I would love to get an absolute truth but who will say it when everything is so politicized and every story serves some interest.

Tatjana

Some neighbors were honorable people throughout the war, while others were not. I can understand that, even though my family never did anything to anybody and they stayed there and shared this tragedy with everybody else. But people were caught in this tragedy, they were lost, they were enraged, and somebody had to be guilty.

In those years of war, the worst lot came to surface and did terrible things. I meet lots of people of all ethnic backgrounds and I see that everybody's lives were shattered by what happened. No normal person of any ethnicity wanted this to happen.

We've got a chance in Canada to try whatever we want. I haven't felt restrained in any way. One of the most honest experiences in all this was a farewell speech a Canadian ambassador made in Belgrade. He said that we were their best investment, beside humanitarian reasons. It was not a chance that exactly we were there leaving to Canada, all young and educated people. What can you do? I often think how would we behave if a situation was different and they had to come to our country. I am not sure how would we behave.

Middle-age participants in this study still struggle to make meaning out of what happened to them. As a result they experience still lots of struggle and distress.

Boriša

The hardest for me is knowledge that these things should not have happened. People say that what happened cannot be changed, but that [war] should not have happened. I cannot comprehend that had happened and I am always looking for who is guilty for this, and that is a waste of time and energy.

Everything reminds me that my life has completely changed and I translate that into my life has been destroyed. It should not have happened this way, my personality cannot accept this and I cannot find peace.

Zdravka

When I think about this war, about the misery it brought upon us, and that all that was for nothing, all those kids on all three sides died for nothing.

This study contributes to research of meaning making by providing evidence that the ability to make meaning out of negative life events helps with better psychological health as indicated by low IES score in the only participant who clearly made meaning

out of these life events and conversely for participants who were not able to make meaning out of negative life events, high IES scores show high psychological distress. In addition to this, this study shows the importance of cultural and social factors for meaning making process because it seems that the lack of meaningful interaction and communication with others impede the psychological process of meaning making.

Implications for theory, research, and clinical practice

In this research study, I found convincing evidence of continuing psychological distress in stories of my participants, former refugees from the former Yugoslavia, who resettled in Canada. At the same time, I was unable to find any evidence of posttraumatic growth and also most participants have not been able to successfully make meaning out of disturbing life events. In the last decade, research on posttraumatic growth and meaning making has been growing. Our society likes to witness human strength and winning against the adversity. However, this can be discouraging for victims. As Wortman (2004) says, "If outsiders believe that growth is prevalent, this can become a new standard that survivors' progress is measured against" (p. 89). Also, even though the theory of posttraumatic growth broadens our perspective on trauma, there is a potential danger for both researchers and clinicians of having expectations that more people would experience posttraumatic growth than what reality presents and that can also further damage rather than help victims. Therefore, the researchers should be aware that this concept of posttraumatic growth might needs more qualitative and quantitative research evidence with more diverse population, and clinicians should be aware that psychological distress might be more likely to be found among the victims than a positive psychological change.

In the case of participants in this study, the disintegration of the country and the resulting war destroyed a known way of living and left people to their own resources. This resulted in a huge shock for people affected and set off the stage for enduring distress. deVries (1996) says,

Culture is supposed to render life predictable. When the cultural defense mechanism is lost, individuals are left on their own to achieve emotional control. Traumas that occur in the context of social upheavals, such as revolutions, civil wars, and uprootings, create profound discontinuity in the order and predictability that culture brought to daily life and social situations (p. 407).

When cultural protection and security fail, the individual's problems are proportional to the cultural disintegration (deVries). In the life of participants in this study, culture disintegrated, communities disappeared, families separated, people lost their friends, neighbors, belongings, their goals, and careers. People lost everything but their lives. In this situation, the participants were faced with enormous multiple challenges and in the situation where all levels of meaningful support had been destroyed, it might not be surprising to find this amount of emotional distress and absence of posttraumatic growth. Counselors should be aware of this, and not readily apply PTG theory to people from the former Yugoslavia and also to people with similar experiences from other parts of the world.

Additionally, even after more than a decade, participants are still attempting to make meaning out of what happened. This might be especially true for the middle-aged people. This study also shows that cultural and social context of support are important for successful meaning making process. Participants who lost meaningful cultural and social contexts might have extreme difficulty in making meaning out of what happened to them. At the same time, this study provided some evidence for connection between

successful meaning making and personal well-being. The only participant who had a sub-clinical score on IES, most clearly accepted what happened and moved on. A caveat here is that this relationship between IES score and made meaning is co-relational and we do not know what other factors might have played a role here (i.e., different personality characteristics).

One of the greatest difficulties for my participants was losing their own country and resettling in a new country where most people speak a different language that they are not able to speak. This situation is especially detrimental because the pool of people to talk to is severely diminished. Consequently, people withdraw and become lonely, as they cannot find satisfactory relationships with people around them. At the same time, people from the former Yugoslavia seem to be wary of counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists because to go to talk to them, might be a sign of weakness and not culturally acceptable. Some people would say out right they were not crazy and they don't need psychological help. Previous research has documented low utilization of mental health services by refugees (Kinzie, 2006).

For refugees, it might be especially helpful to have an organized avenue for them to meet. Also, government should strive to provide the best factual information to these people, when they first arrive, about the life in Canada and how to go about it, so they do not fall prey to various people in a community who might not have their best interest at heart. In addition to this, it might be helpful to organize seminars and psycho-educational workshops where these people would be allowed to talk about their experiences. They can also be taught about known and shared consequences of trauma and generally importance of talking about it so these people would not feel alone and left to their own

resources which are obviously very slim. Bilingual, culturally competent counselors might be the best choice for welcoming these people and providing them with necessary help and information. Also, a care should be taken to be ethnically sensitive, so when refugees come to Canada from civil war-torn countries, organizers should be aware of a designated person's ethnic background. For example, when I came to Canada as a refugee, a Croatian woman was in charge of our group and we were mainly Serbs. This was an entirely negative experience, as this woman did not behave in a respectful manner. That was our first experience in Canada.

More research is needed on different types of trauma and posttraumatic growth because we might run the danger of applying the concepts that are not applicable to special populations (i.e., PTG and survivors of war, exile, and resettlement). In addition to clarifying if posttraumatic growth is applicable to this population, more research should be done with people from other cultures to see if the notion of posttraumatic growth would still be a valid concept in different cultures; particularly more qualitative research is needed for comprehensive theoretical inferences. Considering the importance of cultural and social factors for meaning making, additional research needs to clarify if people who stayed in the former Yugoslavia fare better than people who resettled elsewhere, because even only resettlement, without war and exile, seems to be highly stressful and it seems to add a considerable amount of stress for these already distressed people.

Limitations of the study

As this study deals with stories of people from the former Yugoslavia, it would have been desirable to have participants of more diverse ethnic backgrounds. Of five

participants, three were ethnically Serbs married to Serbs, one was from mixed marriage whose both ex-husbands were Serbs, and one was a Serb married to a Croat. I did not have any Muslim or Croat participants. Within the context of a violent Balkan conflict, it might be understandable why people of more diverse ethnic backgrounds did not come forward. People could tell from my name what kind of ethnic background I have, and because I am a Serb from Bosnia, these people were probably the most comfortable talking to me.

Another limitation of this study might be the fact that all the work was done in Serbo-Croatian and then translated in English. I realized at some points, that it was difficult for me to capture the richness of expressions from my native language.

Lastly, a relatively small number of participants (5) might present another limitation even though we should keep in mind that this was qualitative research.

Conclusion

In this study, I interviewed participants, former refugees from the former Yugoslavia, to find out if and how they made sense of their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement, and also if they experienced positive psychological effects resulting from these life events or if they still experience psychological distress caused by these events. It seems that people are still experiencing a considerable amount of distress caused by all these dramatic changes in their lives. Anxiety, depression, panic disorder, and insomnia are negative psychological effects that these people have been coping with. Younger people seem to fare somewhat better than middle-aged people, even though all of them talk of spiritual and emotional emptiness. It has been difficult to make sense of these events, because people still do not understand why these things happened in the

first place. These events caused so much suffering and it has been difficult to understand all that happened. I could not find any evidence of experiencing posttraumatic growth, and at some point, this concept of posttraumatic growth almost trivializes these people's experiences. There is only so much a person can take on, and certainly to have to live through war, exile, and resettlement is overwhelming for most people. It seems that the common consequence, for my participants, of living through these life events is an "empty soul". Dijana's words sum up the experience the best, "All this has been very difficult, but we survived, and that's it."

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer (Serbo-Croatian)
UNIVERZITET BRITANSKE KOLUMBIJE



POTREBNI UČESNICI

za

***Studiju o ljudima iz bivše Jugoslavije i njihovom
 proživljavanju rata, izbjeglištva, i ponovnog
 nastanjenja***

Svrha ove studije je analiziranje iskustava ljudi iz bivše Jugoslavije sa ciljem da se dobije uvid u način na koji ljudi razumijevaju i objašnjavaju događaje rata, izbjeglištva, i ponovnog nastanjenja sebi i drugima. Osim toga, nadamo se da ova studija pridonese boljem razumijevanju ljudskih promjena koje nastaju kao posljedica proživljavanja ovih događaja.

Ako ste bili odrasla osoba kad je rat počeo u bivšoj Jugoslaviji, voljeli bismo da razgovaramo o vašem proživljavanju ovih događaja. Pozivamo vas na strogo povjerljiv intervju koji će trajati između 1.5 do 2 sata. Ukoliko želite da sudjelujete u ovom istraživanju, javite se Branki Đukić, MA studentu, na telefon (604) 465-0130 ili pošaljite email bdjukic@telus.net

Napomena: Ova studija je magistarski rad Branke Đukić na fakultetu za savjetodavnu psihologiju na Univerzitetu Britanske Kolumbije. Glavni istraživač u ovoj studiji je Dr. William A. Borgen, Profesor, (604) 822-5261.

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer (English)
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



NEEDED RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
for the
Study about people from the former Yugoslavia and
their lived experiences of war, exile, and
resettlement

The purpose of this research study is to explore the stories people from the former Yugoslavia construct about their experiences to better understand the meaning making process and eventual positive changes people might experience in the aftermath of living through difficult times.

If you were an adult when the war started in the former Yugoslavia, we would be interested in hearing your lived experience. If you would like to talk about your experience in a confidential 1.5 to 2 hour interview, please contact Branka Djukic, MA student, at (604) 465-0130 or by email at bdjukic@telus.net.

Note: This research study will be conducted as one of requirements for Branka Djukic for the degree of Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. Principal investigator for this study is Dr. William A. Borgen, Professor, (604) 822-5261.

Appendix B: Letter of initial contact (Serbo-Croatian)

UNIVERZITET BRITANSKE KOLUMBIJE



Odsjek za psihologiju obrazovanja, savjetodavnu
psihologiju i specijalno obrazovanje
UBC Fakultet za obrazovanje
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5259 Fax: (604) 822-2328
www.ecps.educ.ubc

Poziv za sudjelovanje u istraživanju

Poštovana/Poštovani:

Zovem se Branka Đukić. Završni sam student magistarskog studija iz savjetodavne psihologije na Univerzitetu Britanske Kolumbije u Vankuveru i poduzimam ovu studiju da zadovoljim zahtjeve magistarske teze. Nakon završetka, ova teza će biti vlasništvo biblioteke Univerziteta Britanske Kolumbije i biće dostupna javnosti. Svrha ove studije je analiziranje životnih iskustava ljudi iz bivše Jugoslavije sa ciljem da se dobije uvid u način na koji ljudi razumijevaju i objašnjavaju događaje rata, izbjeglistva, i ponovnog nastanjenja, sebi i drugima. Osim toga, nadamo se da ova studija pridonese boljem razumijevanju ljudskih promjena koje nastaju kao posljedica proživljavanja ovih događaja.

Ukoliko ste bili odrasla osoba u vrijeme početka rata u bivsoj Jugoslaviji pozivate se da učestvujete u ovoj studiji. Ja ću vas zamoliti da podijelite sa mnom vašu životnu priču počinjući od vremena kada ste postali svjesni da se rat dešava oko vas. Ovaj razgovor može biti obavljen na vašem maternjem ili engleskom jeziku.

Ukupno vrijeme koje ćete provesti na ovoj studiji je između 2 i 2.5 sata. Gore pomenuti razgovor će trajati između 1.5 do 2 sata. U ovom razgovoru ja ću vas zamoliti da mi ispričate vaše iskustvo. Na kraju razgovora, zamoliću vas da ispunite kratki upitnik. Pitanja iz ovog upitnika odnose se na prisutnost i učestalost određenih tegoba koje ljudi mogu da osjete poslije traume. Učesnici ove studije će biti kontaktirani drugi put elektronskom poštom. Ovaj put učesnici će imati priliku da pročitaju ono što su rekli prethodno. Osim toga, ovo će biti prilika za učesnike da, ukoliko žele, dodaju ili eliminišu nešto iz njihove priče. Svi podaci dobiveni od vas su strogo povjerljivi. Vaša privatnost će biti osigurana korištenjem pseudonima i izostavljanjem i promjenom bilo kojeg podatka koji vas može identifikovati. Svi podaci će biti čuvani u zaključanim kabinetima na Univerzitetu Britanske Kolumbije.

Vaša saradnja u ovom projektu je absolutno dobrovoljna i vi možete odbiti saradnju i odustati od učestvovanja u bilo koje vrijeme u toku studije bez bilo kakvih predrasuda sa naše strane. Novčana naknada za vaše učestvovanje nije predviđena. Ukoliko odlučite da učestvujete u ovom istraživanju, ili ukoliko imate bilo kakvih pitanja, molim vas nazovite me na telefon (604)465-0130 ili pošaljite mi email

bdjukic@telus.net. Glavni istraživač u ovom projektu je Dr. William A. Borgen, Profesor na Univerzitetu Britanske Kolumbije i njega mozete dobiti pozivajući broj (604) 822-5261.

Ja vam se unaprijed zahvaljujem za vašu zainteresovanost i učešće u ovom istraživanju.

Sa poštovanjem,

Branka Đukić, MA student
Odsjek za psihologiju obrazovanja,
savjetodavnu psihologiju i
specijalno obrazovanje
Univerzitet Britanske Kolumbije

Appendix B: Letter of initial contact (English)
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
 Psychology and Special Education
 UBC Faculty of Education
 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4
 Tel: (604) 822-5259 Fax: (604) 822-2328
www.ecps.educ.ubc

Letter of Invitation to Participation

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Branka Djukic, and I am conducting a study about the lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement. This research is one of the requirements for my Master of Arts thesis in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Upon completion, this thesis will be located at the UBC library and it will be available to public upon request. This research will explore the stories of people from the former Yugoslavia, who experienced war, exile, and resettlement, in order to come to understanding of meaning making process and eventual positive changes in the aftermath of these traumatic experiences.

I am looking for people from the former Yugoslavia, who were young adults or adults when the war started. The participants will be asked to tell their life story from the time they realized that the war was happening. This interview will be done in a language of your choice: Serbo-Croatian or English.

I will ask for approximately 2 to 2.5 hours of your time. The first time I will meet you in person and this interview will last between 1.5 to 2 hours. In this interview, I will ask you to tell me your story and this will be audio-taped. At the end of this interview, I will ask you to respond to a short questionnaire about your experience. After I transcribe this interview, I will write your narrative in a story and send it to you for editing and accuracy check. At this time, you will be free to add something new or omit something that you would not like included. Your confidentiality will be fully ensured by using pseudonyms and omitting any identifying detail. The data obtained will be stored in locked filing cabinets at the University of British Columbia.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate and you may also withdraw at any time from the study without prejudice of any kind. Please note that there will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this study. If you decide to participate, or would like further information, please feel free to contact me at (604) 465-0130 or via e-mail at bdjukic@telus.net. The supervisor for this project is Dr. William A. Borgen, Professor at the University of British Columbia, and he can be reached at (604) 822-5261.

Thank you for your interest in this study and I look forward to talking to you.

Sincerely,

Branka Djukic, MA student
Counselling Psychology Program
The University of British Columbia

Appendix C: Informed consent form (Serbo-Croatian)

UNIVERZITET BRITANSKE KOLUMBIJE



Odsjek za psihologiju obrazovanja, savjetodavnu
psihologiju i specijalno obrazovanje
UBC Fakultet za obrazovanje
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5259 Fax: (604) 822-2328
www.ecps.educ.ubc

Informisani pristanak

Ljudi iz bivše Jugoslavije i njihovo proživljavanje rata, izbjeglištva i ponovnog nastanjenja

Glavni istraživač:

Dr. W.A. Borgen, Profesor
UBC, Fakultet za obrazovanje
Odsjek za psihologiju obrazovanja,
savjetodavnu psihologiju i specijalno
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Telefon (604) 822-5261
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Saradnik istraživač:

Branka Đukić, MA student
UBC, Fakultet za obrazovanje
Odsjek za psihologiju obrazovanja,
savjetodavnu psihologiju i specijalno
obrazovanje
Telefon (604) 465-0130
Email bdjukic@telus.net

Pozivate se da učestvujete u studiji o ljudima iz bivše Jugoslavije i njihovom proživljavanju rata, izbjeglištva i ponovnog nastanjenja. Ova studija je dio magistarskog rada Branke Đukić. Rezultati istraživanja će biti dio magistarskog rada koji će kao vlasništvo biblioteke Univerziteta Britanske Kolumbije biti dostupan javnosti.

Svrha istraživanja

Svrha ove studije je analiziranje životnih iskustava ljudi iz bivše Jugoslavije sa ciljem da se dobije uvid u način na koji ljudi razumijevaju i objašnjavaju događaje rata, izbjeglištva, i ponovnog nastanjenja, sebi i drugima. Osim toga, nadamo se da ova studija pridonese boljem razumijevanju ljudskih promjena koje nastaju kao posljedica proživljavanja ovih događaja.

Postupak istraživanja

Naš razgovor sa vama, koji će biti sniman na audio traku, će trajati između 1.5 do 2 sata. Mi ćemo vas pitati da podijelite sa nama vašu životnu priču od trenutka kada ste shvatili da se rat dešava oko vas. Ovaj razgovor možemo obaviti na vašem maternjem jeziku ili engleskom, u zavisnosti od vašeg izbora. Na kraju ovog razgovora, zamolićemo vas da ispunite jedan kratki upitnik. Pitanja iz ovog upitnika odnose se na prisutnost i učestalost određenih tegoba koje ljudi mogu da osjete poslije traume. Učesnici ove studije će biti kontaktirani drugi put elektronskom poštom. Ovaj put učesnici će imati priliku da pročitaju ono što su rekli prethodno. Osim toga, ovo će biti prilika da učesnici, ukoliko žele, dodaju ili eliminišu nešto iz njihove priče. Predviđamo da će učesnici darovati otprilike 2 do 2.5 sata svoga vremena ovoj studiji.

Potencijalni rizik i korist

Ne postoje poznati rizici od učestvovanja u ovoj studiji. Međutim, moguće je da učesnici osjete uznemirenost kad govore o stresnim periodima iz njihovog života. Ukoliko se ovo desi, besplatna terapija je obezbijedena. Sa druge strane, moguće je da u procesu konstruisanja i reflektiranja na njihovo životno iskustvo, učesnici dođu do boljeg uvida i razumijevanja vlastitih iskustava i ovo može imati pozitivan efekat.

Povjerljivost podataka

Svi podaci dobijeni u ovoj studiji su strogo povjerljivi i biti će čuvani u zaključanim kabinetima na Univerzitetu Britanske Kolumbije. Svaki učesnik će biti upisan pod pseudonimom i sve informacije koje bi mogle identifikovati učesnika će biti promijenjene.

Novčana nadoknada

Novčana nadoknada za učestvovanje u ovoj studiji nije predviđena.

Kontakti za informacije o ovom projektu

Ukoliko imate bilo kakvih pitanja o ovoj studiji, molimo vas kontaktirajte Dr. William A. Borgen (glavni istraživač) na (604) 822-5261 ili Branku Đukić (saradnik istraživač) na (604) 465-0130.

Kontakti u slučaju povrede prava učesnika

Ukoliko imate bilo kakvih pitanja ili ste zabrinuti za prava učesnika, molimo nazovite (604) 822-8598. Ovo je telefonski broj ureda za istraživačke usluge na Univerzitetu

Britanske Kolumbije gdje učesnici u naučnim projektima mogu dobiti željene informacije.

Saglasnost

Vaša saradnja u ovom projektu je absolutno dobrovoljna i vi možete odbiti saradnju ili odustati od učestvovanja u bilo koje vrijeme u toku studije bez bilo kakvih predrasuda sa naše strane. Vama je jasno da imate na raspolaganju besplatne savjetodavne razgovore, ukoliko budete smatrali da vam je to potrebno. Sa vašim potpisom potvrđujete da ste zadržali jednu kopiju ove saglasnosti za vaš record. Vaš potpis isto tako potvrđuje da dobrovoljno pristajete da sudjelujete u ovoj studiji.

Potpis učesnika

Datum

Štampano ime učesnika

Appendix C: Informed consent form (English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
Psychology and Special Education
UBC Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5259 Fax: (604) 822-2328
www.ecps.educ.ubc

Informed consent

People from the former Yugoslavia and their lived experiences of war, exile,
and resettlement

Principal Investigator:

Dr. W.A. Borgen, Professor
UBC, Faculty of Education
Department of Educational and Counselling
Psychology, and Special Education
Phone (604) 822-5261
Email william.a.borgen@ubc.ca

Co-investigator

Branka Djukic, MA student
UBC Faculty of Education
Department of Educational and Counselling
Psychology, and Special Education
Phone (604) 465-0130
Email bdjukic@telus.net

You have been invited to participate in a study about lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement of people from the former Yugoslavia. This research is one of the requirements for Branka Djukic for the degree of Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. The results of this research will be a part of a master thesis that will be a public document in the University library once it is completed.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore stories people from the former Yugoslavia construct about their lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement to arrive at better understanding of meaning making process and eventual positive changes that might occur in the aftermath of living through severely disturbing events.

Procedures

This study consists of one 1.5 to 2 hour long interview. This interview is a non-structured, open-ended interview where the participants will be asked to tell their story from the first time they realized that the war was really happening around them. The interview will be done in a language of the participant's choice: Serbo-Croatian or English. At the end of this interview, participants will be asked to respond to a short questionnaire by indicating the true responses for them. The questions on this questionnaire ask participants about the presence and frequency of experiencing certain difficulties people commonly report after trauma. The second time participants will be contacted via email. Each participant will receive his/her narrative account for editing and accuracy check. The total participation time will be approximately 2 to 2.5 hours.

Potential risks and benefits

There are no any direct risks as a result of participating in this study. It is possible, however, that participants might experience unpleasant feelings when talking about highly stressful period in their lives. Free counselling resources are available, if needed. At the same time, the process of telling a story about one's lived experience might contribute to greater understanding, awareness, and appreciation of one's experiences and this might have a beneficial effect.

Confidentiality

The data gathered in this study will be kept strictly confidential in a locked filing cabinet at the University of British Columbia. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and all names of places or other identifying details will be changed for the participants' protection.

Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this research study.

Contact for Information About the Study

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, you may contact Dr. William A. Borgen (Principal Investigator) at (604) 822-5261 or Branka Djukic (Co-investigator) at (604) 465-0130.

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

Consent

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind. You understand that there are free counselling resources available to you should you need it. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you freely consent to participate in this study.

Participant signature

Date

Printed name of the participant

Appendix D: Impact of event scale (Serbo-Croatian)

Skala za mjerenje učinka događaja

Pred vama se nalazi lista komentara koje su ljudi dali nakon stresnih životnih događaja. Molimo vas da naznačite, za svaki iskaz, koliko vam se često to dešavalo u proteklih 7 dana.

Iskaz	Učestalost			
	Nikako (0)	Rijetko (1)	Ponekad (3)	Često (5)
1. Mislio/la sam o tom događaju čak i kada nisam želio/la.				
2. Nisam dozvolio/la sebi da se uzbuđujem kad sam razmišljao/la o tome ili kad me je nešto podsjetilo na to.				
3. Pokušao/la sam da to izbrišem iz sjećanja.				
4. Imao/la sam problema sa spavanjem zbog slika i misli koje su mi padale na pamet.				
5. Povremeno me preplave jaka osjećanja vezana za taj događaj.				
6. Sanjao/la sam o tom događaju.				
7. Izbjegavao/la sam sve što me podsjeća na taj događaj.				
8. Osjećao/la sam da taj događaj nije stvaran ili da se događaj uopšte nije dogodio.				
9. Trudio/la sam se da ne pričam o tome.				
10. Slike o tom događaju su mi se iznenada pojavile pred očima.				
11. Druge stvari su me podsticale da mislim na taj događaj.				
12. Bilo mi je jasno da još uvijek imam jaka osjećanja o tom događaju ali nisam ništa poduzeo/la po tom pitanju.				
13. Trudio/la sam se da ne mislim o tome.				
14. Kad me nešto podsjeti na taj događaj sva osjećanja mi se vrate.				
15. Osjećao/la sam prazninu kad sam razmišljao/la o tom događaju.				

Appendix D: Impact of event scale (English)

Impact of Event Scale

Below is a list of comments made by people after stressful life events. Please read each item, and then indicate how frequently these comments were true to you *during the past 7 days*.

Score using one of these four choices: (0) Not at all (1) Rarely (3) Sometimes (5) Often

Statement	Frequency			
	Not at all (0)	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (3)	Often (5)
1. I thought about it when I didn't mean to.				
2. I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it.				
3. I tried to remove it from memory.				
4. I had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, because of pictures or thoughts about it that came into my mind.				
5. I had waves of strong feelings about it.				
6. I had dreams about it.				
7. I stayed away from reminders of it.				
8. I felt as if it hadn't happened or it wasn't real.				
9. I tried not to talk about it.				
10. Pictures about it popped into my mind.				
11. Other things kept making me think about it.				
12. I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn't deal with them,				
13. I tried not to think about it.				
14. Any reminder brought back feelings about it.				
15. My feelings about it were kind of numb.				

Appendix E: Interview guidelines

I use open-ended, broad questions and probes to facilitate the participants' narratives. I start off with my main interview question and then use a probe to help the telling of the story:

- 1) Could you tell me your story from the first time you realized that the war was really happening?
- 2) Can you tell me what happened next?

To get participants to talk about meaning making, I might use any of the open-ended probes:

- 3) How was that for you?
- 4) How did you feel about that?
- 5) What did you think about that?
- 6) What did you do about that?

I let participants talk without too much interfering, and at the end of the interview, if participants have not already talked about it, I might ask any of the following questions:

- 1) What did you find the most difficult to deal with in all that happened to you?
- 2) How did you cope? What helped you to cope with difficult situations?
- 3) What has changed in your life as a result of these events (Beliefs, values, roles, expectations, relationships, career)?
- 4) Have you changed because you lived through these events?
- 5) How have you changed?

APPENDIX F: Ethics approval certificate

Page 1 of 1



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: William Borgen	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education	UBC BRES NUMBER: H06-02702
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
<small>Institution</small> N/A	<small>Site</small> N/A	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: This study will be conducted out of the UBC Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education offices and co-investigator's home. Interviews may be conducted on campus or participants' homes.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Branika Djukic		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: UBC Faculty of Education - "Meaning making and positive changes after lived experiences of war, exile, and resettlement in people from the former Yugoslavia"		
PROJECT TITLE: People from the former Yugoslavia and their experiences of war, exile and resettlement		
REB MEETING DATE: December 11, 2008	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: December 11, 2009	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: January 12, 2009
<small>Document Name</small>	<small>Version</small>	<small>Date</small>
Protocol:		
thesis proposal	N/A	November 26, 2008
Consent Forms:		
informed_consent_Serbo-Croatian	N/A	November 26, 2008
informed_consent_English	N/A	November 26, 2008
Advertisements:		
Recruitment_flyer_English	N/A	November 26, 2008
Recruitment_flyer_Serbo-Croatian	N/A	November 26, 2008
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
Impact of Event Scale_Serbo-Croatian	N/A	December 21, 2008
Impact of Event Scale	N/A	November 26, 2008
Interview guidelines	N/A	November 26, 2008
Letter of Initial Contact:		
initial_contact_Serbo-Croatian	N/A	November 26, 2008
initial_contact_English	N/A	November 26, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair</p>		