Preface

IN NOVEMBER 1988 my anthropological field research (which had started in September the previous year) in the mainly Muslim community of a mixed Muslim/Catholic village in central Bosnia was drawing toward an end. I had just been to visit some learned Muslims at a sufi sanctuary, and back in the village I was calling in on eighty-year-old Atif to report on who I had met and what they had taught me. I had seen the old man every day for more than a year now as I was living in his house with his son, daughter-in-law, and their children. When I first arrived he had been skeptical of my presence. He, like many other villagers, had not wanted to accommodate me. They had worried about who I was, what I wanted, whether I would stir things up, whether as a foreigner they could trust me—could I not be all sorts of things, including a spy? In addition, as I was a Christian, the women worried that they would have to cook me pork. The Catholics in the village were puzzled that I was staying with the Muslims: Did I not find them "backward," and how could I live without pork and wine? Surely, I thought their religion was better than the Muslims'?

Having visited the village for the fifth time over a period of three weeks, and through the mediation of the local Imam and my mentor from the Ethnographic Museum in Sarajevo, Atif's family decided to offer me a place in their house. Atif had been against his son and daughter-in-law's decision, but his skepticism was not apparent since he was treating me according to the renowned Bosnian code of hospitality. It later transpired that he was worried that I too would tell lies about Islam and the Muslims as, he said, was so common in the West.

But it was not only the villagers; the authorities too were uneasy about my presence. I started specializing in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia in 1986 as part of my Ph.D. program. In 1987 I went to Sarajevo where I spent three months at the ethnographic department at the Zemaljski Muzej before I was granted a research permit to do extended field research in a Muslim community in a mixed Muslim-Catholic village in central Bosnia. Such a permit had never before been granted to a foreign researcher. Although, on the advice of local colleagues, I avoided all mention of ethnicity or Islam in my research proposals to the authorities and instead focused on women and modernization, the local authorities kept a close eye on my whereabouts.

The villagers' distrust of the foreigner, however, slowly turned into trust and warm friendships. That day in November 1988, only two

weeks before I was to return to London, old Atif told me: "When you go back among those people, tell them about us and what you have learned among us. But when you are here among people who know better than you, do not speak but listen." While later trying to write this book in the midst of the horrors of the war and the tremendous sufferings of most of the people who appear in it, I have kept the old man's words in my heart. I can only strive, given my limitations, to be worthy of the trust of old Atif. As an outsider there is a limit to my understanding of his community. In advising how to avoid being drawn into village intrigues, the local *hodža* (Islamic instructor) reminded me that there was a limit to my friendship with and understanding of the Muslims. Ultimately I was not one of them, I was not Muslim. Furthermore, he warned, always remember that people do one thing, say another, and think a third. Since the anthropologist rarely gets access to all three versions from the same person, the above warning is also valid for the reader of this ethnographic account.

In the summer of 1991 the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and their tanks were rolling into Slovenia. This was only the beginning of much worse to come. Ethnically homogeneous Slovenia without any significant minority population did not, however, become the scene of war. The situation turned out very differently in the two republics to the south with large Serbian minorities. When the war broke out in Croatia some months later, people in Bosnia-Hercegovina hoped and believed that they could avoid war, but the unthinkable (and from the attackers' point of view, the inevitable) finally happened in April 1992. The war had raged for exactly a year before it engulfed the village which is the focus of this study. It was in one of the last regions of Bosnia-Hercegovina to be pulled into the horrors. During most of that year, people in the village believed that the only way they could be directly involved in the war was if "outsiders" (*ljudi sa strane*) entered and start provoking them. Even when Bosnian Croat (HVO) and Croat army forces clashed with Bosnian government forces (mainly Muslim) elsewhere in central Bosnia, the Muslims and Catholic Croats in our village continued to live together side by side in peace. In the end what was so painful to most Muslim villagers and to many of their Croat neighbors was that the attackers were not only "outsiders." When HVO started shelling and killing Muslims and burning their houses in the village, some of the Muslims' Catholic Croat neighbors joined in, although the attack had been planned and initiated by people far from the village. Starting out as a war waged by outsiders it developed into one where neighbor was pitted against neighbor after the familiar person next door had been made into a depersonalized alien, a member of the enemy ranks.

After I had revisited the village in May 1993 and had seen almost every Muslim house destroyed and all the Muslims gone, it was very difficult to sit down in peaceful Cambridge and continue writing this book. Nothing of what I had earlier said seemed real or to matter. At the same time, however, it became even more important to write about the community and the lives that had once, not very long ago, existed. It had been a community where people treated each other with dignity and respect, and understood how to accommodate each other's cultural differences.

One of the major difficulties I had to face while writing was the choice of tense. The original manuscript had been written in the ethnographic present, but it became impossible to write in the present when such dramatic changes had taken place, particularly since the Muslims did not live in the village any more. Nevertheless, it also felt wrong to use the past tense consistently, for several reasons. First, much of what is described in the book is still a part of Bosnian Muslims' lives, and of who they are. Second, the military and political situation in Bosnia-Hercegovina keeps changing and therefore where and how people live does too. Third, and perhaps most important, when I talked to Muslims who had fled the village in April 1993 I found that they themselves were mixing tenses in a striking manner, infusing both the past and present with a sense of unreality though also of open-endedness; they were living in a time, a dramatically and constantly changing time, which was neither in the past, the present, nor the future. My own use of tense partly reflects this open-endedness. Yet, there are descriptions of places and events which I know have disappeared or have been destroyed. Here I use the past tense.

In addition to the dilemma concerning the use of tense, I had to make decisions about the use of names on country and language. Before 1992, the period with which this book deals, Bosnians were citizens of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) or Yugoslavia. I have chosen to use the adjective "Yugoslav" within quotes to indicate a past identification, while referring to this former federation by its historical name. Before the dissolution of the Yugoslav Socialist Federal Republic the official language used in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Hercegovina was Serbo-Croat. When the federation split, the language split too. In Serbia, the official language is called Serbian and in Croatia it is called Croatian. There was a slight difference in vocabulary and in accent between Serbian and Croatian, however. This difference has been carefully noticed by philologists in Belgrade and Zagreb, and in addition as part of the nation-state building project they are searching for new words to replace earlier ones that were shared between the two. In

Bosnia the spoken language was a mixture of the Croatian and the Serbian versions of the language, but it also contained a vocabulary specific to Bosnia; some of these words and expressions were mainly used by Muslims. An obvious solution left to the Bosnians was to call their language Bosnian (although in Croat-administered councils in central Bosnia in 1993, the official language was said to be Croatian and children's schoolbooks were printed in Zagreb in the "Croatian language"). Bosnian Muslim philologists on their part are returning to an old Bosnian vocabulary which was common currency in villages and among older Muslims, but before the war was perceived as archaic by the urban, educated elites. When I refer to the language spoken by people in the village I will use the term Bosnian. When referring to the official language before 1992 I will, however, use the term "Serbo-Croat." The village where I worked is situated in the Bosnian part of Bosnia-Hercegovina. I will therefore mainly refer to Bosnia, but will use the full official name of the country in some instances where this seems more appropriate. Because of the volatile political situation in Bosnia-Hercegovina I have chosen not to refer to the village by its real name, using the fictive name Dolina instead. To protect the identities of individuals I have used pseudonyms.

My anthropological training had not prepared me to deal with the very rapid and total disintegration of the community I was studying. Although our theoretical models do allow for social change, these are slow changes that the anthropologist can study by returning to the field at intervals, registering modifications and integrating them into a neat model, which demonstrates for example how people themselves make sense of such changes in a more or less coherent way. In short, it all seems to make sense both to the "locals" and to the anthropologist. This war has made sense neither to the anthropologist nor to the people who taught her about their way of life.

I have been able to follow a Bosnian community over a period of six years during which it has undergone dramatic changes and events. In the late eighties people were working hard against the odds of hyperinflation and economic crisis to improve their lives materially. In 1990 they were full of optimism about the future under the new economic reforms and the political and religious freedoms introduced under the premiership of Ante Marković. In January 1993 it was a village in fear surrounded by war on all sides. Relationships between Muslim and Croat neighbors had come under strain, but people still held on to the hope that they could preserve peace in their village. In April 1993 the village was attacked by Croat forces. In October 1993 none of the four hundred Muslims in the village remained. They had either fled, been

placed in detention camps, or been killed. (In June 1994 the detention camp was closed and its Muslim prisoners released. They and other Muslims from Dolina, who are internal refugees in Bosnia, are waiting to return to their village.) During the winter of 1993 several Muslims from Dolina died of cold, hunger, and exhaustion. Throughout that winter the fighting between Croat and Bosnian forces was ferocious and many of the Muslims from Dolina who had been forced from the village in April kept fleeing—it wasn't safe anywhere any more. Many of the people in the photographs in this book were killed. Among them were twenty-year-old Fatima pictured six years earlier, at age fourteen, cleaning the mosque with her friend. She was killed by a shell as she ran out of a building in the town where she was a refugee. Fatima had tried to assist a young woman who had been hit moments earlier. Her dream before the war had been to study economics in Sarajevo. She was her parents' only daughter and youngest child. This war has claimed the lives of many young Bosnians like Fatima. So many voices have been silenced.

In May 1993 I returned for the second time to central Bosnia after the war had started with a Granada film crew in connection with the making of the "Disappearing World" series documentary, "We are all Neighbours" (our first visit had been in January). We wanted to try and find my friends who had fled the village after the attack by HVO forces two weeks earlier. We found the parents of one of my best friends in their sons' house five kilometers from the village. Their house had been shelled to rubble and two close relatives had been shot while trying to flee. Mehmed, my friend's father, was in deep shock. This particular meeting has remained a powerful image for me both because of its sadness and pain, and because of what it symbolized. I believe the episode sums up thousands of Bosnians' lives in this war. It also echoes my own feelings as I try to grapple with what has happened.

Mehmed took a key out of his pocket and held it in his hand, looking at it as if at a loss for what to do. Then he asked me to go to his house and lock the door, but could I take out some things for him first? He described to me exactly where I would find what he wanted. I knew the house well. Then he said that after I had locked the door I should hand the key over to his neighbor for safekeeping. What was the point, his wife asked. Maybe someone might want to go in there and steal something, he said. We both stared at the key in his hand in silence. I wondered whether he really did not know what had happened to his house. Or did he need me to tell him, to confirm the unspeakable? I could not tell him, he did not hand me the key; we both knew. We were left with a key with no door to fit it. Then I realized that the key and the missing house were not the most significant things in this encounter. Rather it

was the silences about what we both knew, the words we did not speak. This book is also about what has been left unsaid.

Ethnographic accounts draw on the activities, experiences, and thoughts of the people they claim to present. This account is no exception and my greatest debt is to those people in Bosnia who lent their voices to this particular account. Bosnia treated me to her renowned hospitality and there are many to whom I am grateful. I have nevertheless made the difficult decision not to acknowledge by name any of the individuals in the village and beyond who made particular contributions to this book. Those people to whom I am indebted for their assistance and knowledge will know and I hope they will accept my thanks. I should add that the arguments and interpretations put forward here are entirely mine.

My field research in 1987–88 was made possible by a Yugoslav state scholarship awarded through the Norwegian Research Council (NRC) and the generous assistance of the Zemaljski Muzej in Sarajevo. My mentor there was Miroslav Niškanović who, apart from practical assistance, also contributed his ethnographic knowledge. My colleague Gordana Ljuboja encouraged my ethnographic work in Bosnia and provided the initial contacts. In London I am above all indebted to Dr. Peter Loizos at the London School of Economics (LSE) who supervised the doctoral work upon which this study is based. He also commented on a late version of this manuscript. His firm belief in my project was an encouragement throughout. When the war broke out in Bosnia, and after my return visits there in the spring of 1993, his own background from a village which became ethnically divided by war and intercommunal violence enabled him to lend me unique support based on his own insight and understanding. My research at the LSE was partly supported by a British Council Scholarship and a grant from the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund.

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Most of the book, however, was written while I was affiliated with the Department of Social Anthropology in Cambridge. The department provided me with an office and a good and inspiring work atmosphere. While in Cambridge I was also affiliated with King's College. Without the support of a two-year postdoctoral fellowship from the Norwegian Research Council, neither the Cambridge stay nor the book project would have been possible. In Cambridge Susan Ducker-Brown read and made useful comments to chapter four. Figure 2 is a modification of a map made for me by the Zemaljski Muzej in Sarajevo. Zlatan Pilipović made figure 3 and gave encouragement throughout the difficult last year of writing. Lastly, Deema Kaneff read and commented extensively on several chapter drafts. Without her help and support this book would have been considerably more difficult to complete.