

**COLLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION AMONG THE INTERNALLY
DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE BOSNIAN TOWN OF BIJELJINA**

**The Impact of War on People's Sense of Membership and
Belonging**

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DS RS	Democratic Party of Republika Srpska
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GTZ	Technical Cooperation Agency
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
JNA	Yugoslav Peoples' Army
MZ	Local Community; sub-municipal territorial unit
OHR	Office of High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina
PLIP	Property Law Implementation Process
Pravda	Association of Refugees and Social Justice 'Justice'
RS	Republika Srpska
SAO	Serbian Autonomous Region
SDS	Serbian Democratic Party
SDA	Party of Democratic Action
SNSD	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats
TO	Territorial Defence
UdK	Association of Krajina's Citizens
UGPI	Citizens' Association 'The Friends of Ilijaš'
UIRSZR	Association of Refugees and Displaced Serbs from the Zenica region
ZUT	Tuzla Citizens' Homeland Association

Pronunciation Guide

In contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three official languages – Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian, which represent different variants of the same South-Slavic language, formerly known as Serbo-Croatian. The language standards are phonetic, which means that each letter represents one sound. Also, there are two alphabets in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Cyrillic and Latin, the former being used only by the Serbs and by the formal institutions of the Republika Srpska entity.

Throughout the text, certain words from Serbian language were used. Although standard Serbian language uses both Cyrillic and Latin script, the words included in this text were written only in Latin script. The following list provides the pronunciation guidelines for the specific letters which differ significantly from English:

The letter c is pronounced as “ts” (as in *cats*)

The letter j is pronounced as a y (as in *yellow*)

The letter č is pronounced as “ch” (as in *cherry*)

The letter ć is pronounced as soft “ch” (like the “ci” in Italian word *ciao*)

The letter š is pronounced as “sh” (as in *shoe*)

The letter ž is pronounced “zh” (like the “s” in *vision*)

The letter đ is pronounced “dj” (like the “g” in the Italian name *Giorgio*)

The letter dž is pronounced “dj” (like the “j” in *jump*)

The letter nj is pronounced “ny” (as in *Sonya*)

The letter lj is pronounced “ly” (like the “ll” in *million*)

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1. Introduction

Two Serb women from Bijeljina are talking, and one starts complaining to another:

“My daughter has brought such a misfortune upon our family! Can you imagine it – she has married a Muslim man?!”

Says the other: “Come on, you shouldn’t be complaining, it could be much worse than that.”

“What could possibly be worse than this?”, asks the first woman.

“Well, she could have married *a refugee*”, replies the other.

In the last two decades, the local society in the north-eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina has produced a vast number of jokes like this one. Refugees [*izbjeglice*, plural], whom this and other similar humorous stories refer to, are actually *internally displaced* Serbs who found refuge in Bijeljina after they had fled in fear, or had been forcibly expelled, from the territories controlled by the enemy (Bosniak [Muslim]¹ and Croat) armies² during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter also Bosnia or BiH).

Being internally displaced, and, as it is the case with *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina – *forcibly* displaced, means that a person or groups of persons seek refuge from armed conflict, persecution, situations of generalised violence or violations of human rights, within the borders of their own state. This distinguishes internally displaced population from refugees, who seek protection outside an internationally recognised state border

¹ ‘Bosniaks’ was a historic name dating back to medieval times that was officially re-instated during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to designate the Bosnian Muslim population in this country. It was introduced in September 1993 by the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals who decided to replace the previously used name *Muslimani* (Muslims) in an ethno-national sense (written with the capital ‘M’ to differ from *muslimani* written with the small letter ‘m’ which signifies religious identity) (Bougarel 2009).

² Officially - The Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* - ARBiH), established by the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 and consisting of mostly Bosniak and, to a lesser extent, Croat soldiers. The Bosnian Croat official military formation during the 1992-1995 war was Croatian Defence Council (*Hrvatsko vijeće obrane* - HVO). The Army of Republika Srpska (*Vojska Republike Srpske* - VRS) represented the official armed forces of Bosnian Serbs.

(UNHCR 1998; see also Grabska and Mehta 2008; Jacques 2012; Phuong 2004). In Bijeljina's colloquial speech, however, no distinction has been made between the terms 'refugees' and 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs). The local population in Bijeljina uses the term 'refugee' for every forcibly displaced person, regardless of their place of origin, i.e. whether they were expelled from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina or some other country. The term *izbjeglice* persists until this day, in spite of the fact that majority of these newcomers in Bijeljina have in the meantime lost the legal status of the internally displaced persons. What is more, the term *izbjeglice* persists in spite of the fact that more than two decades ago, this particular group of displaced Serbs voluntarily decided *not to return* to their pre-war homes, but to make Bijeljina their new permanent residence.

The joke which opens this introduction symbolically reveals the two features of the Bijeljina society which could serve as a starting point for exploring the main topic of this study. One is related to the notion that the local population in Bijeljina sees the aforementioned group of displaced people in their town in an extremely unfavourable light. Even though the local Serbs in Bijeljina and their co-ethnic newcomers share a number of important characteristics (such as ethnicity, religion and language), marrying one's child to a refugee, as this joke suggests, seems to be perceived as one of the greatest social and cultural adversities for the local Bijeljina families. The joke, however, tells just one side of the story. Seeing another, culturally very similar group of people in negative light does not represent one-way process – the IDPs in Bijeljina also tend to attach a number of cultural stereotypes to the local Serb population. These generalised and simplified images of cultural 'other' which have been utilized for more than two decades, do not persist for the sake of humorous comments only, but are an important aspect of identification process of both of these population groups.

Another point is related to the notion that such established social distance between the locals and the newcomers in Bijeljina appears to be given more importance than some other, usually very pronounced, social divisions within the wider post-war Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. Following the brutal three and a half-year armed conflict between the three main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats)³, ethno-national divisions and antagonisms have become the most

³ In socialist Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Muslims (the latter since 1974) were separate nations [*narods*, meaning people or a people, determined by the factors such

evident and presumably the most salient factors in shaping the social relations in this country. However, as the humorous commentary which opens this introduction implies, the local Serbs in Bijeljina might be prone to believe that a 'cultural other' (a refugee), rather than an 'ethnic other' (a Muslim, i.e. Bosniak), represents a less acceptable option when it comes to establishing close family relations. Therefore, when it comes to one group's understanding of self and 'other' in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, social and cultural factors can carry more relevance than ethnic ones when they are observed on micro-level, i.e. within the specific socio-cultural setting.

This study focuses on these group(s) of displaced Serbs in Bijeljina, their particular post-displacement experiences, reasons behind their decision to resettle, as well as their adaptation and integration into the local Bijeljina community, with special emphasis on their relationship with the local Bijeljina population. More concretely, the study explores the question of how has the war and the experience of forcible displacement influenced these particular groups' identification process or their sense of membership and 'belonging', and it does so through relying on sociological, anthropological and social psychological approaches to social identity, seen as a dynamic concept. Having in mind that forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been given a lot of academic attention, but that those who decided to resettle in their place of refuge and not return to their pre-war homes have been exempted from academic discussion, this study aims to fill this gap by putting the category of re-settlers in centre of its interest. Rather than presuming that re-settlers' post-displacement life trajectories were in a way less troublesome and their struggles less challenging than for some other categories of displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this study employs a bottom-up approach in order to find out whether and to what extent the experiences of refugees, returnees, and similar groups affected by forcible displacement, differ from the experiences of Bijeljina IDPs who, although they were offered the opportunity to return to their pre-war homes, voluntarily resettled among their co-

as language, religion and history, but also by their geographical position in relation to the borders of the state]. *Narodi* differed from nationality [*narodnost*; those who did not live wholly or mainly within the borders of Yugoslavia, i.e. Albanians, Hungarians] or national minority [*manjina*; numerous other smaller groups such as Vlachs, Roma]. Within Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs, Croats and Muslims were the three main nations or *narodi*, declared as the country's 'constituent peoples' [*konstitutivni narodi*], meaning that they were 'state-forming' people and not a *narodnost* or *manjina*. The status of 'constituent peoples' meant that the country belonged to neither Serbs nor Croats or Muslims, but equally to all three of them. Although the term *narod* translates as 'people' in English, in this study the Serb, the Bosniak/Muslim and the Croat people are mostly referred to as 'nations' or 'ethnic', 'ethno-national' or 'ethno-religious' groups.

ethnics. Instead of focusing only on displaced people's sense of loss, longing for lost homes and desire to return, by studying the re-settler community in Bijeljina, this study will explore the question of why these forcibly displaced people wished *not* to return, and single out the most important factors that have influenced this decision. Given the fact that academic interest for the topic of forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina has decreased in the second decade after the armed conflict, by revisiting the problem of internal displacement, this study attempts to shed new light on the way in which people conceptualize this experience as a significant life event. In other words, through investigating the way in which forcible displacement has influenced people's lives more than two decades after it occurred, this study seeks to provide insight into re-settlers' understanding of themselves in the world, and world in relation to themselves, even after policymakers and academics alike turned their attention to some other issues.

This study is also striving to present the first comprehensive ethnographic research on Bosnian and Herzegovinian displaced people's identity negotiation and renegotiation process. Without denying an indisputable affect that ethnic identities have on virtually all spheres of social life in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, this study aims to draw attention to people's sense(s) of 'belonging' which do not necessarily include their ethnicity as a prevailing quality shared with other members of a particular social group. As ethnic identities are impossible to separate from the topics of war and forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this study analyses their influence on Bijeljina IDPs' identification process, and especially on their resettlement decision. However, significant attention will also be given to other, non-ethnic aspects of Bijeljina IDPs' self-understanding, as well as to these identities' interconnection with Bijeljina IDPs' forcible displacement experience and their integration into the local Bijeljina society. Hence, this study will thoroughly analyse what it means to be a refugee [*izbjeglica*, singular] as opposed to being a *Semberac* [a person from Semberija], to be of urban as opposed to being of rural [*seljak*, singular] origin, to be 'ordinary people' [*obični ljudi*] as opposed to 'war profiteers' [*ratni profiteri*], or to originate from one, and not from some other town or region of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this way, this study intends to avoid typical perception and classification of Bosnians and Herzegovinians as Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats only, and to point out that people in post-

war Bosnia and Herzegovina possess a multitude of different identities that, at times, can matter more than their sense of ethnic belonging.

1.1. Theoretical background and research questions

Social identity is our understanding of who we are and who other people are, based on a membership in different social groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered, political, religious, etc.). It emphasizes similarities through which persons either associate themselves, or are being associated by others, with different social groups, on the basis of some prominent feature which is considered to be shared with other members of these very same groups (Barnard and Spencer 2005). Social identity is not simply a thing people do or do not possess (Eriksen 2004), a specific 'property' of the individual, but should rather be understood as a process of identification which is open for constant negotiation and re-negotiation due to new individual experiences and ever-changing social circumstances (Hogg and Abrams 1998).

At the same time as we are defining who we are similar with, or who we believe we are like, we are also defining who we are unlike. Social identity presupposes this relationship between similarity and difference – similarity between ourselves and other members of our in-group ('us'), and differences in relation to members of other out-groups ('them'). Also, not only do we identify who we are and who other people are, but we are, at the same time, being identified by others. Social identity is not unilateral; the way in which we see and define ourselves is equally important for our self-understanding as the way in which others see and define us (Jenkins 2008 [1996]). Individuals who identify themselves collectively in different ways do not become aware of their identities while living in social and cultural isolation. Quite the contrary – social identities are being created, confirmed and negotiated in the process of interaction with other groups, in the relationship between 'us' and 'them', and this interaction is established across social boundaries. In other words, social identity can be understood as a product of the process of boundary formation between ourselves and others. The existence and persistence of a particular social group is dependent upon the existence of other groups, and upon maintenance of social boundaries between them (Barth 1969).

Similarities within an in-group, differences in relation to various out-groups, as well as boundaries between them – they are all social constructs which exist symbolically in the minds of the group members. As much as it is impossible for all members of one ‘same’ group to think and behave in the exact same way, the features they have in common, or certain shared ‘symbols’, allow them to believe that they actually do. The shared symbols, therefore, unite members of a particular group despite their apparent differences, and generate a sense of belonging to the group in question. Distinctiveness between different groups and ‘reality’ of their boundaries are also not objectively apparent; their perception can vary greatly depending on the specific meanings each group member attaches to them (Cohen 2001). Moreover, social identities and social boundaries could be defined as situational, contextual and relational. Depending on a specific social context, our particular social identity or identity of others can be strongly emphasized, while in some other instances they might be found completely irrelevant. Boundaries can be invoked with respect to some groups, under certain circumstances and for some purposes, but not for some other, or they may be obvious to one group, but imperceptible to other (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Cohen 1994, 2001).

Social psychological approach to social identity theorizes that individuals strongly identify with the relevant in-group, attaching emotional significance to that identification, after which their self-esteem becomes dependent on it. Aiming to maintain positive group distinctiveness and self-esteem, people favour their own group (‘us’) when comparing it against other ones (‘them’), and, as a consequence, they attribute negative characteristics to the members of these out-groups. This can result in negative stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, or even intergroup conflicts (Tajfel and Turner 1986), and it occurs despite the fact that the groups in question can share a number of important characteristics, such as language, religion, ethnicity or class (see e.g. Elias and Scotson 1994 [1965]). Additionally, there is a tendency to minimize the perception of differences between in-group members, and, on the other side, to maximize intergroup distinctiveness, especially on those dimensions which reflect positively upon in-group (Hogg and Abrams 1998). The more similar in-group and out-group are in their values and aspirations, the more acute the intergroup social competition, and the higher the need to emphasize differences between them, no matter how minor and negligible they might seem to be (Blok 1998; Brewer 2001). In some

instances, as Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) observed, social oldness of one group in a particular area was a sufficient factor that created a gap between old residents ('the established') and new residents (the 'outsiders') of Winston Parva.

When these briefly summarized theoretical discussions are applied to the two groups of people described in the beginning of this introduction –the locals and the IDPs in the north-eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina– the main objective of this study could be defined as aiming to answer the following questions:

- (1) What have been the identification strategies of the internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina in the context of their forcible displacement experience? How have the identities of these displaced persons been produced and reproduced in a new social and cultural setting?
- (2) What have been the identification strategies of the internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina in relation to the local population? How have the notions of selves ('us') and other ('them') been expressed, and what purpose they served in this particular local setting?

Hence, the study will examine whether the IDPs' common displacement experience helped them in forming a distinct social identity, or, to put it differently, it will focus on exploring the question of who Bijeljinan IDPs are in relation to their experience of forcible displacement. While answering the first question, the study will be looking into the manner in which identities of IDPs in Bijeljina have been negotiated and renegotiated from the perspective of *perceived similarities* among the members of this displaced group of people, and based on a common feature embedded in their shared shattering displacement experience. Through answering the second question, the study will explore the negotiation and renegotiation of social identities of Bijeljinan IDPs based on *perceived differences* in relation to the local population. The study will tackle the issue of the emergence and maintenance of social boundaries between the locals and the IDPs in Bijeljina, the way in which these boundaries were represented, and their function in social interaction.

1.2. Research relevance

This study relies on the scholarship on forcible displacement of people, whether it took place inside or outside the state where armed conflict, persecution, or violations of human rights have forced people to leave their homes. In doing so, the study primarily, though not exclusively, takes into account those cases of population displacements which occurred due to disintegration of multinational empires (e.g. Ottoman) and other federal states (e.g. Yugoslavia, USSR) into incipient nation-states, whereby these nation-states represent displaced population's 'ethnic homelands'. This 'ethnic unmixing of peoples' (Brubaker 1995) results in reconfiguration of political space along ethnic lines and transformation of ethnically heterogeneous empires/federations into more-or-less ethnically homogenous successor states (see Čapo-Žmegač 2007: 27-33). For displaced populations, finding themselves in 'ethnic homeland' means uniting with their co-ethnics and, from the minority status in multinational political entities, becoming a part of the national majority. Given the fact that in these situations ethnicity takes primacy over many other collective identifications, and that displaced people and their hosts share precisely this 'same' ethnicity, religion, and usually language too, it is expected that their incorporation into the new physical and social environment happens more smoothly and more quickly compared to those cases where they become displaced in completely alien social and cultural spaces.

Unlike the cases mentioned above, Bosnia and Herzegovina did not disintegrate after the 1992-1995 war, but it became highly decentralized, consisting of two different entities and one autonomous district. The three main ethnic groups and former warring parties got concentrated in different, largely ethnically homogenous parts of the country, obtaining high level of territorial, political, and cultural autonomy. Bosnian Serbs represent the majority population in the Republika Srpska (RS) entity, while Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) and Croats are predominant ethnic groups within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). Moreover, the FBiH is divided into ten cantons, some of which are predominantly inhabited by Croats, while some others have majority Bosniak population. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been associated with aggressive ethnic cleansing campaigns, through which a dominant ethnic group aimed to systematically and forcefully remove other ethnic groups from certain territories, with the intent of making these territories ethnically homogeneous. About

one million Bosnians and Herzegovinians got internally displaced as a result of these ethnic cleansing campaigns (UNHCR 2000). In the aftermath of the war, ethno-national political elites used ethnic engineering in order to consolidate their exclusionist territorial gains which were made during the war. Ethnic engineering presupposed allocating the land free of charge and offering other benefits to co-ethnic IDPs, with the objective of persuading them to permanently settle in the places of refuge, i.e. those territories where their ethnic group constitutes the majority. As a result, many IDPs decided to remain in these areas, and not return to their pre-war homes in which they would obtain the status of ethnic minority.

The main topic of this study concerns internal displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the territories controlled by one or more ethnic groups where IDPs were in minority, to the territories controlled by another ethnic group with whom the IDPs in question shared the same ethnic and religious identity, and where they became part of the ethnic majority. More concretely, the Serbs from the territories which in 1995 became the majority Bosniak and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina got displaced in the majority Serb municipality of Bijeljina within the Republika Srpska entity, and decided to make it their permanent residence. Thus, this particular case of Bijeljina IDPs becoming re-settlers, as well as other similar cases within Bosnia and Herzegovina, could be characterized as a sort of 'intrastate unmixing of peoples', and shares a number of common features with other examples of co-ethnic migrations analysed in this study.

The scholarship on displacement of people to their co-ethnic territories have documented that refugees and IDPs obtain a sense of a common identity in their new social settings, based on the shared displacement experience, as well as their cultural encounter with co-ethnic local population. Even when there are very diverse displaced groups of people in terms of their geographical origins, class, and other characteristics, their similar ordeal caused by sudden disruption and loss, creates feelings of compassion for each other's pain. This, in return, results in the establishment of closer ties between the members of the displaced group(s) and encourages the formation of a separate 'refugee' or 'IDP' identity which, however, vary across different generations (Loizos 1981, 2008; Pilkington 1998). Moreover, the sense of a separate identity is reinforced through displaced people's efforts to keep close links with certain elements of their past lives, and especially those which are considered the most important for

their self-identification process. For example, refugees and IDPs tend to replicate their former spatial and environmental heritage in the new settlement sites, or to form various associations and organisations responsible for preservation of their culture and tradition. All these serve as a medium through which displaced persons can retrieve the sense of continuity with their past lives, and restore violently disrupted feelings of 'belonging' (Alpan 2012; Hirschon 1998 [1989], 2004; Koufopoulou 2003; Stelaku 2003).

The formation of a distinct refugee or IDP identity is also influenced by displaced people's close encounter with the members of the receiver community. Identification processes of both these population groups –the hosts and the newcomers– are being affected by an unexpected presence of the other, very similar group. As the hosts and the newcomers recognize each other as a threat to their established definitions of selves, they strive to maintain positive self-esteem and group cohesion through overemphasizing minimal intergroup differences and discriminating against members of the other group. Even when the perceived threat stems from the competition over scarce resources available in a given society (see e.g. Brun 2003; Čapo-Žmegač 2007; Dragojević 2010; Dunkan 2005), it usually gets manifested through the ascription of negative cultural and personality traits to the members of the threatening group. The hosts attach a number of negative characteristics to their co-ethnic newcomers and vice versa, from being primitive, backward and uncultured, to not being decent or proper representatives of their respective ethnic and religious communities. As these studies point out, ethnicity does not seem to be a determining principle of identity in the cases of co-ethnic migration, as it does not prevent either of these two groups from treating each other as culturally different and alien, and from developing a vast number of stereotypes which portray the other group as socially and culturally inferior (Čapo-Žmegač 2007; Clark 2006; Dragojević 2010; Duijzings 1995; Hirschon 1998 [1989], 2003, 2006; Köker 2003; Koufopoulou 2003; Pilkington 1998; Stelaku 2003).

This study aims to give contribution to the scholarship on identity negotiation and renegotiation in the context of forcible displacement of people to their co-ethnic territories. While drawing parallels with the existing scholarship in this subject area, the study will explore the way in which the identities of internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina have been formed and transformed, whether having in mind their shared displacement experience, or their cultural encounter with the local Serb population.

Taking into account its main research questions and the abovementioned body of literature, this study is going to explore the following topics: Have the shared experience of forcible displacement influenced Bijeljina IDPs sense of 'belonging' to a particular social group? If so, what are the *perceived similarities* among Bijeljina IDPs that have been imagined as crucial factors in their identification process? What has been the relationship between displaced group(s) of people and their co-ethnic hosts in Bijeljina, and how have the *perceived differences* between these two groups reflected on IDPs' understanding of self and other? The important contribution of this study to the existing scholarship on identity and forcible displacement to co-ethnic territories lies in the fact that Bijeljina IDPs refused to return to their pre-war homes, although they were given such opportunity in the immediate aftermath of the armed conflict. Hence, seeing Bijeljina IDPs as voluntary re-settlers (see below) who thus *did not want* to return, this study is aiming to find out if and to what extent have their post-displacement experiences (such as sense of loss, nostalgia for their 'homes' and 'homelands', social integration process) differed from the post-displacement experiences of those refugees and IDPs who *could not return* to their homes, although they predominantly wished to do so.

The re-settler status of Bijeljina IDPs is even more relevant and worth exploring within the scholarship on forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as no scholarly attention has been given to the re-settlers as the main research subjects, neither an in-depth research has been conducted on the displaced population's identity negotiation processes. The scholarship on internal displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina has mostly addressed this issue from the two different angles, none of which has exclusively dealt with the topic of the displaced people's identification process. The first one involves approach 'from above', which analysed the reach of the international and state policymaking regarding refugees' and IDPs' return process, and especially in relation to the so-called 'domicile return'. Domicile return was the policy established in the Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) –the treaty which ended the war in 1995– which ensured the right of all Bosnian refugees and IDPs to freely return not only to their country of origin, but to their very pre-war homes. In majority of cases, these homes were at the territory controlled by some other ethno-religious group, where returnees would be in minority. This so-called 'minority return' was strongly supported by the international actors involved in the return process, as it

was seen as a tool for reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing and re-establishing multi-ethnicity across the country, thus ultimately restoring 'normalcy' in people's lives. That this policy was only moderately successful, and that in many instances it neglected the 'quality' aspect of the return process and went against the wish of the displaced persons, were some of the main critiques expressed in the scholarship on forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see e.g. Belloni 2005, 2007; Black 2001; Black and Gent 2006; Dahlman and Toal 2005; Eastmond 2006; Heimerl 2005; Jansen 2006, 2007, 2011; Phuong 2000; Stefansson 2004, 2006; Toal and Dahlman 2011; Toal and O'Loughlin 2009; Žiža 2015).

In relation to the objection that 'minority return' policy was only moderately successful, the abovementioned body of literature has stressed that the international actors involved in the return process underestimated the level and intensity of obstructions to return by the ethno-nationalist local leaderships, whose ethnic engineering campaigns postponed at best, and prevented at worst, return of refugees and IDPs to their pre-war homes. Also, early return waves from the countries of Western Europe came at the time when no sufficient security, economic and social conditions were met for sustainable return, so they actually stimulated repatriation of BiH refugees into internal displacement on the territories controlled by their respective ethnic group, which, contrary to international community's main policy goal, furthermore consolidated the effects of ethnic cleansing. Finally, although the international community's property restitution policy which aimed at stimulating refugees' and IDPs' return has been successful, in reality, many Bosnians and Herzegovinians have not returned to their homes after they reclaimed their properties. Instead, they have sold and rented their properties, or kept them only as holiday sites while continuing to live abroad or on the territory dominated by their own ethnic group. When it comes to the objection that the international community's return policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina neglected the 'quality' aspect of the return process and, in many instances, went against the wish of the very refugees and displaced persons, it has been stressed that, due to great politicization of the return question and international community's main goal of 'rightening the wrongs' caused by ethnic cleansing campaigns, the act of return was perceived less as a matter of an individual's choice, and more as a matter of international policymaking that was imposed at times. The number of actual returns has been given primacy over return sustainability, i.e. over creating the

socio-economic conditions for effective long-term enjoyment of people's right to return. Additionally, such defined policy and the way it has been implemented has largely disregarded those categories of displaced population who did not wish to return but decided to resettle for various reasons, ranging from security issues, dissatisfactory socio-economic conditions, missing social networks, or difficult access to healthcare and desired educational system upon return – all those factors which prevented them from feeling safe, free and hopeful in their pre-war places of residence (see below).

Even when in the abovementioned body of literature the question of forcible displacement has been approached by giving voice to the displaced persons themselves, it has primarily been done through the prism of ethno-national identities, putting emphasis on the role of ethno-national belonging and impact it has on the displaced people's everyday life. For example, a lot of attention has been given to the minority returnees, who used to be seen as the most vulnerable category of population at the time, given the fact that they tried to move on with their lives while surrounded by the majority ethnic group, risking to become subjects of violence and intimidation, and victims of diverse forms of discrimination. However, except for minority returnees, forcible movement of population in Bosnia and Herzegovina have given rise to many other social categories, in relation to which the identities of people in this country got shaped and reshaped. These are, for example, internally displaced persons, returnees, those who fled the country, those who stayed behind, those who resettled within the country, and similar. In addition, the war in Bosnia has greatly affected a large range of other categories, such as gender, class, generation, urbanity/rurality, and occupation, which, given the exceptional interest in ethno-national identifications, got somewhat neglected in the scholarship on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bougarel et al. 2007; Jansen et al. 2016).

Against this background, another body of literature has approached the issue of forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina 'from below', while, at the same time, trying to shed light on social relations and social identities which have been working against or outside the dominant ethno-national paradigm. Some of these studies argued that there are certain social identities that people of all ethnicities in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina identify with, and which, in addition, transcend the usual ethno-national divisions. Such is, for example, the non-ethnic and trans-ethnic category of *pošteni ljudi* [decent, honest people] (Kolind 2007; 2008), or *narod* [people, common

folk] (Hromadžić 2013) which represent something morally pure, as opposed to *politika* (Gilbert 2016; Kolind 2008) and *političari* [politics and politicians] or *foteljaši* [armchair politicians] (Grandits 2007), which refer to Bosnian and Herzegovinian political leaders who are associated with something manipulative, immoral and untrustworthy. These categories, therefore, play the role of unifying factors among different ethnic groups in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the other side, there are also numerous categories which exist outside the sphere of ethno-national identities, but which have been acting as dividing factors in everyday social relations, and mostly within one particular ethnic group. The studies which have explored these categories pointed out that, although ethnicity has been given the greatest scholarly attention, it represents only one of the several significant social identities, and only one source of several notable social cleavages in post-war Bosnian society (see e.g. Black 2002; Bougarel et al. 2007; Eastmond 2006; Jansen et al. 2016; Kolind 2007, 2008; Pickering 2003, 2007; Poggi et al. 2002; Stefansson 2004a, 2007; Žila 2015). Pickering (2007), for example, underlined that class and urban-rural origin, together with social distance between Bosnian refugees and persons who stayed in Bosnia during the war, are also noteworthy social cleavages that can, and very often do, cut across ethnicity. Similarly, in his study on refugee return in Sarajevo, Stefansson (2004a; 2007) argued that ethnic polarisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to be less problematic than some other social divisions, such as relationship between urban and rural population, locals and newcomers, or returnees and those who stayed in the country during the war (stayees). Jansen (2005: 154) emphasized the importance of urban-rural divisions in all post-Yugoslav societies which need to be given more attention in academia, considering them to probably be “the most widely shared non-nationalist framework for understanding events in the region”.

It is in this body of literature on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina that identities of IDPs, as well as other population categories whose status has been defined in relation to their forced displacement experience (e.g. returnees), have been given the most attention. This scholarship has elaborated on the vast number of stereotypes that these particular categories of population employ in their everyday interaction, creating efficient social boundaries between themselves. The cleavages between local population and co-ethnic newcomers –the topic of particular importance for this study– have mostly been put in the context of urban-rural differences, whereby, in the

overwhelming majority of cases, the attention has been given to the relationship between *urban locals* and *rural newcomers*, and rarely the other way around. Various studies have documented that rural origin of the newcomers to the urban areas represents the most important factor in bolstering negative stereotypes and discriminatory actions against the newcomers by their co-ethnic local population. The rural newcomers/IDPs have been perceived as being uncultured, primitive, uneducated, poor, traditional, religious and politically radical (see e.g. Eastmond 2006; Jašarević 2007; Kolind 2008; Maček 2009; Pickering 2007; Poggi et al. 2002; Stefansson 2006, 2007; Toal and Dahlman 2011; for negative stereotyping of rural locals by urban newcomers see e.g. Armakolas 2007). Therefore, the shared ethnic identity between locals and newcomers in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not lessen the significance of perceived cultural differences between these two groups. These findings challenge the narratives of unconditional unity and cultural homogeneity within one particular ethnic group, which have often been stressed in the post-war rhetoric of the ethno-national political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hence, as long as the scholarship on identity and displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, there have not been extensive and systematic ethnographic studies on those categories of BiH citizens which have in some way experienced forcible displacement. This question has usually been analysed from the 'top-down' perspective, emphasizing different policies and deficiencies in their implementation, or 'from below', but in the context of different social cleavages within the Bosnian society (such as urban-rural dichotomy). Both these perspectives have denied agency to the displaced persons, as they have either approached this issue from the point of view of the international and state policymakers, or those population categories which stand in opposition to the forcible displaced Bosnian and Herzegovinians (such as local population, in opposition to newcomers/IDPs). Furthermore, the interest for the question of internal displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina had its peak in the early years after the armed conflict, after which this issue got significantly less attention, presumably because it has been considered more or less resolved, or because some other issues (such as the state-building or the country's economic recovery) have come to the forefront. Also, as some studies stressed out (see e.g. Bougarel et al. 2007; Brković 2017a; Jansen et al. 2016), there has been an uneven geographical spread of ethnographic inquiries in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the territory of

the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) entity, as well as the Serb population in Bosnia and Herzegovina more generally, have been largely underrepresented. A notable exception represents an ethnographic study of Čarna Brković (2017a; see also 2014, 2014a) which deals with the question of social protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More concretely, it focuses on 'vernacular' (Brković 2017b), grassroots expressions of humanitarianism, i.e. different humanitarian actions [*humanitarne akcije*] in contemporary Bijeljina, and the way people navigate the state institutions by using their social connections in order to get medical treatment abroad for their family members.

With the above in mind, this study is going to address the IDP's identification process 'from below', which means that it will give voice to the displaced persons themselves, focusing on their own experiences, perspectives, and concerns as they emerged and got articulated in this particular local setting. The city of Bijeljina has been chosen as a field setting because of the significant size of the IDPs community. According to the 2013 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 32.27 per cent of all Serbs in Bijeljina have had the status of internally displaced persons in the war and post-war years. Also, given disproportionately small number of ethnographic studies conducted in the Republika Srpska entity or among the Bosnian Serbs, and, more importantly, among the re-settlers within Bosnia and Herzegovina (see below), this study is aiming to fill this gap by choosing the re-settler community in majority-Serb municipality of Bijeljina situated in the majority-Serb territory within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, by addressing the question of forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina more than 20 years since the end of the armed conflict in this country, this study will raise the question of how have the war and forcible displacement influenced the lives of displaced population and their perception of themselves in the world, while taking into account this specific time distance. Does the experience of forcible displacement have the capacity to influence displaced people's self-identification process in spite of the existing time distance? Through revisiting this question more than two decades after the displacement occurred, this study attempts to shed a new light on the way in which people in Bosnia and Herzegovina conceptualize their experience of displacement as a significant life event.

Importantly, there have not been extensive ethnographic studies on the category of re-settlers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or those members of displaced population who decided not to return to their pre-war places of residence, but to integrate into new

local societies within the territory where their co-ethnics constitute majority. As the re-settler communities *willingly* opted for resettlement over return, this made their post-displacement struggles presumably less severe and less worth exploring than struggles of some other categories of population affected by the war and forcible displacement (e.g. those who wished to return but could not do so for various reasons, minority returnees, etc.). Also, since the re-settlers have remained on the territories dominated by their co-ethnics and got subjected to the authority of their respective ethno-national political elites, both international and national policymakers and academic community have given them less attention than to some more vulnerable population categories, especially those who returned to the territories where they constituted ethnic minority. Most importantly, such ‘relocation’ of refugees and IDPs (i.e. their permanent settlement in ethnically majority areas) has been largely understated, and seen as “some sort of taboo” (Phuong 2000: 175) because it went against the aim of the international policymakers to restore the country’s pre-war heterogeneous demographic composition. The IDPs’ decision to resettle has primarily been seen through their strong sense of ethno-national belonging and their support to their respective ethno-national elites, who –through the campaigns of ethnic cleansing during the war and ethnic engineering in its aftermath– attempted to consolidate exclusionist territorial gains that were made during the war.

This study is going to put re-settlers in the centre of its ethnographic inquiry, attempting to explore the question of why Bijeljina IDPs decided not to return to their pre-war homes. In doing so, it will take into account the extent to which a particular aspect of these IDPs’ identification process, i.e. their *ethnic* identities, affected their resettlement decision, but it will also look into the understanding of this specific group of re-settlers of what constitutes one’s ‘home’ and what does not. Some studies on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina which tackled the issue of refugees’ and IDPs’ return process more generally, have already pointed out that people’s embodied attachment to particular territory or geographical place (‘home’) should not be taken for granted, neither their unconditional desire to return to that place upon forcible displacement (see e.g. Čapo 2015; Jansen 2006, 2007; Stefansson 2004, 2006; Žíla 2015). Displaced people look for restoration of feelings of security, familiarity, freedom and hopefulness, and tend to settle down in those places where they can “begin working towards a better life” (Allen and Turton 1996: 5), even if it means leaving their former ‘homes’ behind.

Taking this body of literature as a starting point, but also reflecting on a wider scholarship on place and identity (Al-Ali & Koser 2002; Allen 1996; Allen and Turton 1996; Black 2002; Flynn 2007; Korac 2009; Malkki 1992; Turton 2005; Zetter 1998), this study will examine the question of what it means to be 'at home' for a more specific category of displaced population – Bijeljina IDPs, and why this 'home' is in Bijeljina, rather than in their pre-war places of residence. By exploring the question of how the war and forcible displacement influenced Bijeljina IDPs' sense of 'belonging' in territorial terms, and by letting the voice of the very re-settlers to be heard and taken into account, this study's important contribution lies in its attempt to challenge the overall assumption that IDPs' resettlement decision in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be seen through the prism of their ethnic identifications and ethnic loyalties only.

Moreover, given the attention that urban-rural cleavages have got in the scholarship on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that these cleavages have been emphasized as the most important reason for social boundary creation between locals and newcomers, it is necessary to additionally explore their relevance and impact on everyday social relations. The urban-rural cleavages have been evident in Bijeljina and in the wider region of Semberija as well, whereby positive values, such as being modern, cultured, sophisticated and educated, are associated with people's urban background, while some negative values, such as being primitive, uncultured, unsophisticated and uneducated, are considered to be the main characteristics of those people who originate from rural areas. The latter category of population is referred to as *seljaci* [peasants, plural; *seljak*, singular] – the term which has frequently been employed in everyday discourse of all Bijeljina citizens. This study will aim to find out who are *seljaci* in Bijeljina, is it only their rural origin that qualifies them as such, and what purpose these cultural stereotypes play within this specific social setting? Importantly, the study will look into the correlation between locals/newcomers status and perceived level of people's urbanity and rurality. Bijeljina represents a suitable setting for exploring these questions because it has been the place of refuge for diverse groups of displaced people, originating from both urban and rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereby a considerable number of IDPs from larger urban centres such as Sarajevo, Zenica or Tuzla, have settled in Bijeljina's countryside. Hence, while the existing scholarship has mostly addressed this question through the relationship between *urban locals* and *rural newcomers*, by choosing Bijeljina as a field setting, this study will also explore the

relationship between the reverse categories, i.e. *rural locals* and *urban newcomers*. Through the exploration of this relationship, this study will try to find answer to the question of whether the existing negative perceptions of displaced persons/newcomers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as some studies suggest, exist exclusively because of the IDPs' rural background, or some other factors and circumstances too need to be taken into account.

In relation to urban-rural divisions and following the studies which claim that, although ethnicity has been given the greatest scholarly attention, it represents only one of the several significant social identities in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (see e.g. Black 2002; Bougarel et al. 2007; Eastmond 2006; Jansen et al. 2016; Kolind 2007, 2008; Pickering 2003, 2007; Poggi et al. 2002; Stefansson 2004a, 2007; Žila 2015), this study is going to explore the assumption that ethnically based groups and categories in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not quite as solid, stable and relevant in all aspects of social life, as it has usually been stressed and given attention to. In other words, through answering its main research questions, the study will seek to contribute to the insufficiently explored question of whether some other social cleavages in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as class, urban-rural origin or local-newcomer status, can be equally or more significant within particular social settings and under particular social circumstances.

1.3. Research methods

As it was mentioned earlier in this introductory chapter, social identities are not fixed and static, but could be defined as identification processes, which are always negotiable and dependent on the specific political, economic, social and cultural contexts in which members of a particular group find themselves. Social identities are also being developed having in mind the presence of other social groups, in relation to which social boundaries between these different collective entities are being created and maintained. Therefore, when we are attempting to learn about identities of a particular group of people, we should not be asking the question of what are these people really

like in a sense of their given and definite group quality, but how have their identifications developed in a particular social setting.

While aiming to explore identification strategies of Bijeljina IDPs, this study is going to take into consideration how members of this very group understand and talk about themselves from the perspective of perceived similarities with other in-group members, as well as from the perspective of perceived differences in relation to the members of various out-groups. Moreover, the study will bear in mind the impact that numerous other factors have on the identification process of Bijeljina IDPs, such as concrete policies and measures applied to this category of population, social groups they came in interaction with, or different characteristics of the particular local society where Bijeljina IDPs found themselves in a specific moment in time. As our identity is a relational phenomenon and depends on how members of other groups see and define us, this study is also going to address the issue of how local Serbs in Bijeljina, which is the closest cultural group to the IDPs in this city, perceive their 'cultural other', and how this perception reflected on IDP's understanding of themselves in the world, and the world in relation to themselves.

Given this study's aims explained above, and its intent to approach the question of identification strategies of Bijeljina IDPs 'from below', it mostly relies on qualitative research methods (and mainly on ethnographic field research), which attempt to understand and make sense of phenomena from participant's perspective (Berg 2001 [1989]; Merriam 2002). Qualitative research methods allow researchers to closely experience what is experienced by members of the group they are studying, and to gain deeper understanding of the unspoken rules which guide the group members' actions and behaviour. Through qualitative research methods, such as interviews, participant observation, document analysis and other activities which involve continuous and direct interaction with the subjects of the study in situ, it is possible to obtain the insiders' perspective regarding their understanding of the social world, and their position and role in it (Adams 2009; Creswell 2007). In the context of this study, through choosing in-depth interviews which provide very detailed information and direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton 2002), it is possible to gain understanding of how Bijeljina IDPs talk about and act with regards to their identities, what meanings they attach to them, how they define themselves having in mind their displacement experience and in

relation to other groups, and it will be accomplished by letting the voices of the very respondents to be heard and taken into account. The data from observations which consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviours and actions, or participant observation which presupposes researcher's personal engagement in the activities of his/her subjects (Patton 2002), also represents a valuable source for exploring the main topic of this study. Through qualitative research methods, this study creates possibility to understand particular group of people behind statistical data and beyond abstractly defined social categories, and to spot and highlight certain particularities within supposedly 'same' and uniformed social group, as it is being defined at the mere ascriptive level.

The long-term research distance from the events I was, among other, interested in exploring, has given the chance to my interviewees to be more open, objective, and reflective concerning their forcible displacement experience. However, at the same time, this time distance has limited my ability to personally grasp my subjects' feelings and observe their actions in the initial stages of displacement, which, in absence of any other written and otherwise recorded data, made me feel exclusively dependant on my interviewees' personal and sometimes selective recollections. Other limitations of these research methods, and especially in-depth interviews that this study largely relies on, lies in the fact that they lead to an overall pattern or descriptive synthesis of subjects' experience(s) (Osborne 1994), so it is not possible to make generalisations about the results. While the findings obtained through these qualitative research methods can be extended to people who share the same experience, or who have characteristics similar to the population under study, "gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations" (Mack 2005: 2). Hence, the study does not aim to make generalised and verifiable predictions, but to present and interpret meanings that a particular group of people attaches to their identities in a particular political, economic, and socio-cultural setting, thus aiming to help explain identification practices among forcibly displaced population and provide framework for future research.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this study rely on the existing literature on social identity, interrelationship between people's identities and their displacement experience, as well as on the scholarship which critically addressed the question of international

policymaking with regards to the refugees' and IDPs' return process in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. A comprehensive academic literature which would address the topic of Chapter 4 is missing. For this reason, the findings in this Chapter are primarily based on an extensive and thorough analysis of various data, interviews and opinions published in the local Bijeljina's newspaper *Semberske Novine* [Semberija's newspaper], which during the war carried the name *SIM Novine* [Semberija and Majevisa newspaper]. Other sources used in Chapter 4 include the existing academic literature, international organisations' reports and documents, documents of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), official data of Bijeljina municipality and entity's ministries, as well as my own interviews with local Bijeljina citizens and former officials. Unless cited otherwise, the research findings in Chapter 4 rely on the data obtained from the 638 issues of *Semberske Novine/SIM Novine*, published in the period from 1990 to 2012.

The subsequent chapters of this study (Chapters 5-7) present the findings which are obtained through ethnographic field research conducted in Bijeljina from May 2016 to December 2017. I was also paying visits to Bijeljina before and after this period, but the continuous, as well as the most active and intensive fieldwork took place within this specific timeframe. I have interviewed some former officials in the Bijeljina municipality, representatives of Bijeljina leading political parties and police, especially concerning the topics of wartime events in Bijeljina and local authorities' post-war policies with regards to the internally displaced persons. I have visited premises of Bijeljina's major IDPs' associations, conducted interviews with their representatives, obtained their working and other material, and participated in the activities of some of these associations' managing bodies. I have also conducted 30 in-depth interviews with the members of displaced groups of people in Bijeljina, and 14 in-depth interviews with the individuals who belong to the local Serb population. Although I initially planned to conduct more in-depth interviews, the aforementioned number has been influenced by surprising similarity between the responses, and visible repetition in presented arguments of all the interviewees, which, furthermore, largely matched the arguments presented by my interlocutors more generally. While making the decision about the number of conducted in-depth interviews, the general rule on sample size for interviews was followed, which states that when the same stories, themes, issues, and

topics are emerging from the interviewees, then a sufficient sample size has been reached (Boyce and Neale 2006).

For the purpose of conducting these interviews I used snowball sampling, whereby I initially asked my acquaintances to recommend some persons that would be willing to discuss the given topic with me, and then I would ask these interviewees to suggest somebody else I could recruit for the same purpose. It has been brought to my attention that any other random selection technique might prove to be dissatisfactory, as the formerly displaced population in Bijeljina –due to extremely high engagement of different organisations concerned with the issues of internal displacement throughout the years– has developed a feeling of suspicion and distrust towards unfamiliar or non-recommended researchers. The shortest interview lasted about 45 minutes, while the longest one lasted around three hours (majority of the conducted interviews lasted around two hours). These interviews have been recorded and later on re-listened and typed in a form of detailed notes, together with my other observations, concerning the interviewees' non-verbal expressions as they occurred during the interview. Although I made my interviewees aware that they do not need to talk about anything they do not feel comfortable about, majority of my interviewees did not have a problem in discussing some very personal and very sensitive issues concerning their wartime and post-war experiences. Only three interviewees from the category of the local population rejected to be recorded, in which case I only took detailed notes during the interview.

I had a clear plan regarding the topics which should be discussed during the interview, which I kept constantly in mind and used as a guidance during the conversations. In the beginning of an interview with Bijeljina IDPs, after introducing myself and the main topic of my study, I would ask the interviewees to simply narrate about their displacement experience from the time point they find relevant in their particular case (sometimes it is a couple of years before the war, sometimes those months of uncertainty before the outbreak of the war, sometimes the very day when they were expelled, or when they found refuge in Bijeljina). I thought that by letting them speak freely in the very beginning, they would get the opportunity to become more comfortable and open up. Based on the information that was being shared, I would then guide the conversation, allowing topics to flow naturally, and giving interviewees a chance to raise certain questions on their own. For me, this was very important as it offered an information on which topics my interviewees find relevant

and important (and which they do not), or how they define certain terms and phenomena without being explicitly asked about them. Whenever it was possible, the interviews took place in the interviewees' homes. I believed that this was one more important factor in creating a more relaxed atmosphere in which the interviewees would feel more confident in my presence, and more comfortable in sharing their lived experiences concerning the sensitive topics of war and forcible displacement. Conducting interviews in the homes of Bijeljina displaced persons has also given me the opportunity to observe more closely the way in which their households were organized, as well as their lifestyle more generally.

Initially, my interviewees belonged to the younger group of population (between 25 and 36 years old), but then I expanded my network to older generations, too (the oldest one was 83 years old). In the end, there were more interviewees who belonged to the latter category of population, as I figured out that they have more experiences to share through in-depth interviewing, including questions concerning their pre-war lives and lifestyles which proved to be an important aspect of their self-identification process. There was an almost equal number of female and male interviewees, and they had diverse educational background (from elementary school to a Master's degree). I especially paid attention to encompass IDPs with diverse pre-war addresses, and equally of rural and urban origin. The interviewees had their pre-war homes in Sarajevo, Vogošća, Ilijaš, Visoko, Zenica, Travnik, Tuzla, Bugojno, Maglaj, Kladanj, Drvar, as well as rural areas of central Bosnia, and Majevisa and Ozren mountains. Also, I interviewed IDPs who resettled in both urban and rural areas of Bijeljina municipality.

While older generations were slightly more represented in in-depth interviews, when it comes to everyday social interaction and informal conversations, I have spent more time with those IDPs who belong to the younger category of population. Due to our similar age and shared interests, it was easier to initiate contact with the younger group of displaced persons, who then introduced me to their parents and grandparents, and invited me to participate in their everyday social activities. Together with Bijeljina IDPs, I attended various events of importance for this group of Bijeljina population, starting from their family celebrations, narrow community gatherings, cultural and commemorative events, pilgrimages to the religious sanctuaries in their pre-war places of residence, and similar. The time spent with the members of the displaced group of people in Bijeljina has also given me the opportunity to create spontaneous contacts

with many individuals, and to participate in numerous informal conversations which directly or indirectly concerned the issues which are of relevance for this particular study.

Importantly, I did the fieldwork in the region where I grew up, and in its surrounding villages where I have relatives and friends. I lived in Bijeljina during the 1992-1995 war and I witnessed the arrival of internally displaced persons to this city, some of whom in the meantime have become my close friends and members of the wider family circle. Although not in a capacity of an academic researcher, I was also in a position to closely observe different developments from the early displacement period of Bijeljina IDPs, such as quality of their accommodation, scope and character of their main economic activities, or expansion of numerous 'refugee settlements' within the region of Semberija. Despite the fact that I have not lived in Bijeljina for the last 15 years, I paid frequent visits to my family members which belong to the category of local Serb population, and I was very familiar with the local setting in general. Among other reasons, certain observations made during my visits to the region, and especially during my 18-year long life in Bijeljina, have made me feel interested in conducting research on this specific topic in the first place.

Being a member of the local society under study, or being a 'native' researcher and doing 'anthropology at home', unquestionably implies certain advantages and disadvantages. The former implies that a person working within his/her 'own' society and among his/her 'own' people possesses a more authentic point of view and can more accurately describe and understand the society in question, especially due to knowing the language and being familiar with local surroundings which, among other, secures better access to the subjects under study. The latter implies that a person who conducts fieldwork in his/her 'own' society does so from a position of intimate affinity, whereby loyalty towards this society and possible difficulties in keeping emotional distance may make him/her incapable of maintaining the necessary degree of objectivity (Banks 1998; Huong 2007). Moreover, 'native' researchers can take many things for granted because they assume that they have commonalities with their research subjects in terms of experiences and knowledge within the specific society, which can result in not paying enough attention to some important issues, or lead to insufficient clarification regarding the phenomenon being studied (Suwankhong and Liamputtong 2015). However, the line between those who can be considered 'native' researchers and those

who cannot is often blurred and depends on the specific research context and the way the researchers are being perceived by their research subjects – “anthropologists can be natives – as strangers, just as often as they are strangers – as natives” (Weil 1987: 197, as quoted in Jahan 2014: 1). Additionally, both insiders and outsiders perceive and interpret social reality from different points of view, and “no matter how hard each tries, neither can completely discard his preconceptions of what that social reality is or should be” (Jones 1970: 257). Hence, while native anthropologists have the task to somehow ‘distance’ themselves in both intellectual and emotional sense, non-native anthropologists too have to be capable of avoiding the multiple layers of their own cultural categories and meanings (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

Also, the fact that I have spent most of my adult life outside of this specific geographic area qualified me as a ‘halfie’ researcher, meaning that, for my interlocutors, I simultaneously possessed both an insider and an outsider status (Abu-Lughod 1991; Loizos 1994; Subedi 2006). Having in mind the researchers from the non-West who conducted fieldwork in their home society after living and being educated abroad, Abu-Lughod (1991: 137) described ‘halfies’ as “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage.” Banks (1998) recognizes four types of researchers: the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider and the external-outsider. The indigenous-insider refers to an individual who “endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it”, while the indigenous-outsider refers to an individual who “was socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outside or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider” (Banks 1998: 8). Thus, the ‘halfie’ researcher could be defined as being simultaneously both the indigenous-insider and the indigenous-outsider type of researcher. This specific position of a ‘halfie’ researcher allows him/her to collect data with full insight and understanding of the research subjects’ lives, beliefs and behaviours, while, at the same time, approaching the research topic with considerable detachment from these very perspectives. On the other side, as Subedi (2006) argues, ‘halfie’ researchers often

face challenges in trying to prove to or convince some participants of his/her identity as a 'legitimate researcher' (trustworthy, credible, committed), especially when it comes to demonstrating their language competence, knowledge of the histories or experiences of the society in question, as well as commitment to meaningfully assist this society's needs. Additionally, Abu-Lughod (1991) stresses that this specific 'in between' status of the 'halfies' –or their "split selves"– can impede reconciliation between researcher's speaking 'for' and speaking 'from', because the 'halfies' write for and have to answer to multiple parties, and are more accountable to how they research and write about the people they affiliate with. To paraphrase Loizos (1994: 45), the complexity of the research position of 'halfies' lies in the dilemma of "how to serve two masters and satisfy them both."

In line with the arguments presented by Narayan (1993; see also Banks 1998), this study stands against the fixity of a distinction between 'native' and 'non-native', or 'cultural insider' and 'cultural outsider' researcher. As Hastrup (1993) argues, the key point of doing anthropology is to bridge the intimate and implicit 'native' knowledge, and an external and explicit 'expert' understanding. The researchers, both native and non-native, should be able to 'know' the social space as participants, and, at the same time, to 'understand' this social space as detached analysts. Thus, instead the question of who is an insider and who is an outsider, it is more profitable to view each researcher "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations", whereby "factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status" (Narayan 1993: 671-672). These different identities of a researcher, and especially the way in which he/she is being identified by others in the field, affects the knowledge that fieldworker produces about informants and has to be taken into account as part of the data (Adams 2009; Bernard 2006; Fortier 1998; Merton 1972; Pelzang and Hutchinson 2018).

As already mentioned above, my age did play certain role during the fieldwork, insofar as it was easier to establish close relationship and engage in wider range of activities with my peers in Bijeljina, than with those much older than myself. However, once the relationship with the latter category was established, and given the main conversational topics of interest for this study, neither my age nor my gender seemed to have influenced the responses and the behaviour of my interviewees and interlocutors

more generally. As far as my ethnicity is concerned, I believe that the fact that I am an ethnic Serb just like an overwhelming majority of locals and IDPs in Bijeljina (and just like all of my interviewees), has created a more trusting relationships between my research subjects and me, insofar as our shared ethnicity made my interlocutors feel freer to talk about their ethno-national identification and all that such identification entails. Because they considered me to be 'one of theirs' who inherently possesses the same views on these particular issues, my interlocutors did not hesitate to openly express even some of those feelings which are usually not being shared without serious reluctance, such as their strongly negative perception of the ethnic and religious groups other than their own.

Finally, my geographical origin and my kinship with a local Serb family in Bijeljina, qualified me as a researcher who belongs to the category of the domicile population, which has probably been the most important aspect of my own identity, as seen and understood by most of my interlocutors. Although mostly stated in a humorous manner, some of my interlocutors would mention that they might have been 'softening' their responses to some extent, as they were afraid they could potentially offend me by commenting on 'my own' people in an unflattering way. In these situations, bearing in mind the specific regional identity they associated me with, they would usually comment on a given topic by saying "do not get me wrong, but...", or "if you do not mind me saying this..." However, my 'halfie' status has played a counterbalancing role in such situations, preventing my link with the local Serb population in Bijeljina to seriously corrupt my interlocutors' opinions and behaviour. On the one hand, seeing me partially as an insider, my interlocutors were aware of the fact that I have certain knowledge of the local Bijeljina society and that I would be capable of recognizing their dishonesty concerning some major developments and events which have occurred in this particular social setting. On the other hand, seeing me partially as an outsider, my interlocutors felt stimulated to tell their life stories and express their points of view on a wide range of topics, as they considered me being in need to 'catch up' with the regional issues that I have presumably missed 'while I was away'.

This specific aspect of my personal background embedded in my simultaneous insider and outsider status has also been an important factor in the process of reflecting on myself as the researcher. Given the fact that I have spent most of my adult life in the

societies of Southeast Europe which are very similar to my field setting, as well as that I have paid frequent visits to my 'home' society while living abroad, my subjects were much more inclined to perceive me as 'one of their own' in cultural sense, than as a cultural outsider. In that sense, contrary to the experiences of some researchers who were educated and trained in the West (Subedi 2006; see also Pelzang and Hutchinson 2018) and who needed to "mask their double consciousness" in order to be taken seriously while researching their 'own' non-Western society, I have not felt as lacking the necessary credibility and legitimacy among my interlocutors, who largely saw me as an authentic local. On the other side, while my personal connection to the place where I grew up is indisputable, living for a long period of time away from that place and being educated and trained abroad, made me feel detached from its norms, values and ideas, which once, to a lesser or greater extent, used to influence my worldview. While, in certain cases, this detachment from some of the cultural assumptions and beliefs of my 'home' society needed to be hidden in fear of alienating my research subjects, in an overall perspective, it has helped me maintain a necessary degree of objectivity and has prevented me from thinking and behaving as a 'native'.

1.4. The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 expands on theoretical approaches to social identity and literature on identity and displacement which were briefly summarized in this introductory chapter. It analyses the interrelation between identity and displacement – the two concepts which are of principal importance for exploring and understanding the main topic of this study. Combining primarily sociological, anthropological, and social psychological theories, the first part of this chapter deals with different theoretical approaches to identity, and *social* identity more concretely. The second part offers an overview of the literature which addresses the question of mass population displacement and the impact such an experience has on displaced people's identification process. In line with the main objectives of this study, the emphasis will be put only on the cases of *forcible* displacement of population, and primarily on the ones which occurred as a result of inter- and intra-state conflicts. Hence, those studies which have in mind voluntary

movement of people motivated by socio-economic advancement, or involuntary displacement which took place due to different natural disasters or development projects, are not going to be addressed at this point. Also, priority will be given to displacement of population to the territories controlled and dominated by those groups of people with whom the forcible displaced persons share nominally 'same' ethnic identity, whether it happened within or outside their own state. The third part of Chapter 2 employs the presented theoretical approaches to social identity and the scholarship on forcible displacement to explore interrelationships between these two concepts in the context of the 1992-1995 war and population movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It introduces some of the social cleavages that either have newly emerged or have been reinforced due to the violent conflict and mass population movement, but which have been working outside and against the dominant ethno-national paradigm. Only those cleavages which involve the categories of population whose status has been defined in relation to their forced displacement experience (e.g. IDPs, returnees, etc.), are going to be taken into account.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at forcible displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the strategies employed with regards to refugees' and IDPs' return process in the aftermath of the 1992-1995 armed conflict in this country. It addresses the question of what has been the reach of international policy-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina with regards to the Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) and the 'domicile return' concept it established. A special attention will be given to the limits of return policies, and how certain deficiencies in these policies' implementation have affected lives of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Through analysis of this question, this chapter aims to shed light on a broader legal, political and social context in which Bijeljina IDPs in particular have found themselves in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. It attempts to present a general political and social framework in relation to which the identity of Bijeljina IDPs has been negotiated in local and wider social community.

Chapter 4 introduces the specific field setting in which the research for this study has been conducted – the north-eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina. How has the 1992-1995 war affected Bijeljina's demography, but also the local politics and society, is the main question which will be answered in this chapter. The chapter examines the demographic changes within the Bijeljina society triggered by the violent conflict, with special emphasis on the arrival of internally displaced persons. Whereas the previous

chapter offers insight into forced displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina more generally, this chapter takes a closer look into those groups of forcibly expelled Bosnian Serbs who found refuge in the particular locality with Bijeljina as its centre, and decided to make it their permanent residence. Their number, geographical origins, early displacement experiences, as well as local authorities' response to IDPs' housing and other problems, are the questions which will be given special attention. Also, Chapter 4 looks into some of the major wartime events in Bijeljina, in order to offer a better understanding of the political, social, and cultural environment in which the newcomers to Bijeljina found themselves upon forcible displacement.

Chapter 5 addresses the question of what it means to be an internally displaced person in Bijeljina from the perspective of perceived similarities among the members of the displaced group of people. By giving voice to the IDPs themselves, Chapter 5 looks into Bijeljinan IDPs' displacement experiences since their arrival to this city until today, reflecting on their socio-economic concerns and emotional struggles, as they emerged, got articulated, and in certain cases got overcome, in this particular local society. A special attention will be given to Bijeljinan IDPs' feelings of loss, which have strengthened the IDPs' compassion for each other's tribulations, and reinforced their solidarity and a sense of a common *izbjeglica* identity. Chapter 5 also presents the main activities of the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, such as their efforts to keep elements of IDPs' specific pre-war identities present in their new places of residence, as well as their devotion to articulate and solidify Bijeljinan IDPs' collective memories of the wartime and post-war events. These activities, as Chapter 5 furthermore argues, have power to provide a sense of sameness among Bijeljinan IDPs, especially those who have been displaced from the same geographical regions within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chapter 6 focuses on the reasons behind Bijeljinan IDPs' decision not to return to their pre-war places of residence, but to resettle at the territory of Bijeljinan municipality. It looks into the way that the war, forcible displacement, and concrete international and national policies employed with regards to their return vs. resettlement strategies, have transformed the meaning of 'home' for Bijeljinan IDPs. Chapter 6 also addresses the question of what it means to be a displaced Serb in Bijeljina, analysing the way in which the above factors have influenced Bijeljinan IDPs'

sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group, and their relationship with the ethnic other.

Chapter 7 addresses the question of what it means to be an internally displaced person in Bijeljina from the perspective of perceived differences between the members of the displaced group(s) of people and the local population in Bijeljina. It analyses the ways in which identity of the displaced group(s) of people in Bijeljina has been negotiated in relation to the presence of another, very similar group of people, the emergence of social boundaries between them, and the function of these boundaries in social interaction. How this relationship between the locals and the newcomers has developed taking into consideration the two groups' competition over principal sources of power available in this particular local society, and which cultural stereotypes have been employed to designate 'us' from 'them', are the main questions which will be answered in this chapter. Given the significance that the urban-rural cultural dichotomy has been given by Bijeljinan IDPs in their post-displacement identification strategies, the issue of perceived rurality (i.e. uncultured-ness) of the local population, as opposed to perceived urbanity (i.e. cultured-ness) of the displaced population in Bijeljina, will be given a special attention.

The final, Chapter 8, summarizes the key findings and points made throughout this thesis, and offers final, concluding remarks regarding the main topic of this study and its main research questions.

2. Identity and Displacement

2.1. Social identity: theoretical perspectives

Social scientists have long been interested in the question of how individuals and collectives understand and construct themselves and one another. The term 'identity' which today, more broadly, represents our understanding of who we are and who other people are (as well as other people's understanding of themselves and the others), was brought into general use by the psychoanalytic theorist Erik H. Erikson (1959). Since then, the term has been widely used across different disciplines, from psychoanalytic studies to social psychology, anthropology, sociology and political science, gaining the reputation of one of the most popular, but also the most complex and ambiguous concepts in social science (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Malešević 2002, 2006). As Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 1) argue, the term "tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)". What is common for these different approaches, however, is that they all analyse identity as a dynamic construct that shapes interrelations between individual behaviour and social reality (Korostelina 2007).

'Identity' is mostly used in two different but intertwined senses, which may be termed as 'personal' and 'social' identity. In the former sense, the term refers to properties of uniqueness and individuality, stressing the *differences* which make a person distinct from all others (as in 'self-identity'). In the latter sense, it stresses the *similarities*, i.e. the qualities of sameness, through which persons either associate themselves, or are being associated by others, with different groups or categories on the basis of some (alleged) salient common feature. Anthropologists have tended to focus primarily on social identities (from ethnic and cultural, to gendered, political and religious), emphasizing individual's social and cultural surroundings, as well as mechanisms of socialization and cultural acquisition (Barnard and Spencer 2005).

Korostelina (2007) defines social identity as people's sense of who they are based on their (collective) group membership(s). It is „a feeling of belonging to a social group (...), a strong connection with social category, and (...) an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behaviour” (15). As such, social identity creates “a conceptual bridge between individual and social levels of social reality”, and serves as “a link between an individual's psychology and the structures and processes of large social groups” (17). According to Gecas (2000, as quoted in MacKinnon and Heise 2010: 98), social identities incorporate a sense of commonality with others “in the form of group memberships or categorical identifications” and are based on “the multiplicity of identities that individuals possess by virtue of their group memberships and role relationships.” With the aim to simplify and clarify often contradictory definitions of social identity in academic discourse, Fearon (1999: 13-14) defines social identity as “a social category, a group of people designated by a label (or labels) that is commonly used either by the people designated, others, or both”. To ask about identities of people, Fearon further argues, is often to ask about the social categories in which they placed themselves (or were placed by others) and how they thought about the content of these social categories (beliefs, desires, moral commitments, or physical attributes), as well as about specific rules of membership.

Within psychology and sociology, Tajfel (1981) underlines the importance of two aspects: cognitive and emotional. He defines social identity as “that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (255). In anthropology, as Eriksen (2004: 157) stresses, when we speak about identity, we always refer to social identity, which has to do with “which groups a person belongs to, who he or she identifies with, [and] how people establish and maintain invisible but socially efficient boundaries between us and them”. Jenkins (2008 [1996]) stresses that the individually unique and the collectively shared identity are entangled with each other and can be understood as similar in important respects. He believes that all identities are, by definition, *social* identities. “Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation” (17). Hence, adding 'social' in this context is to some extent redundant.

Within social identity there is a further distinction between two levels of social selves. The first one (*interpersonal identity*) is derived from interpersonal relationships and interdependence with specific others which involves personalized bonds of attachment (e.g. the relationship parent-child or doctor-patient). The second one (*collective identity*) is derived from membership in larger, more impersonal collectives or social categories (e.g. ethnic group), where (impersonal) bonds among the members are derived from common identification with this symbolic group or social category. While both the interpersonal and the collective identity involve affective and cognitive categorization processes, the difference between the two lies in the level of inclusiveness (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Furthermore, collective identity presupposes a person's identification with a group or category in such a way that the group identification becomes significant for the person's individual identity. In other words, when collective identities are activated, the most salient features of the self-concept become those that are shared with other members of the particular collective entity (Brewer 1991). Collective identity, thus, represents an important part of self-conception which influences individuals' perception of themselves, but also of society as a whole.

For the purpose of this study, and following primarily Jenkins' (2008 [1996]) analysis of the concept of identity, social identity is understood in following terms:

1. Social identity is not fixed and static, but is rather a *process of identification*, constantly open for negotiation and change;
2. Identification process can never be unilateral; it is a matter of both *internal* and *external definition*;
3. Identification is always a matter of relationships of *similarity* and *difference*;
4. Identifications are to be found and negotiated at their *boundaries*, where internal and external meet, and are the product of social interaction across these boundaries.

2.1.1. Identification process

Although individuals are born into a particular society with largely pre-existent social categories, the social structure is not a static monolithic entity, but is constantly in flux, constantly changing (Hogg and Abrams 1998). In the process of social interaction, an

individual's social identities are continuously negotiated and re-negotiated. The concept of *identification* emphasizes this fluid and dynamic aspect of identity and its ongoing reconceptualisation due to new individual experiences, as well as diverse and ever-changing social circumstances in which an individual finds himself/herself. Therefore, rather than seeing identity as a fixed and static attribute of individuals and collectives, we should understand it as a process of 'being' and 'becoming'. That process is prone to change, and change is always, at least in principle, a real possibility (Jenkins 2006). As Jenkins (2008 [1996]: 5) describes, identity "is a process – identification – not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does". Similarly, Eriksen (2004) sees identification as a continuous process, and not simply a thing people do or do not possess. Korostelina (2007: 18) defines identification as "a permanent, incomplete, and open process of socialization that prompts one to search actively and independently for one's own personality and strengthens the subjective component in the formation of self-conception".

The identifications which are established early in life (primary identifications), such as selfhood, human-ess and gender, in addition to, under certain circumstances, kinship and ethnicity, are usually more robust and resilient to change than some other identities which are acquired subsequently. When it comes to these primary identifications which are, at the same time, attributes of embodied individuals, although they are not set in concrete, fluidity represents the exception rather than the rule (Jenkins 2008 [1996]).

2.1.2. Internal and external definition

Identification is not the exclusive 'property' of the individual, but something that is realized and negotiated through interaction with others. The way in which we see and define ourselves (*internal definition*) is equally important as the way in which others see and define us (*external definition*). Identification is a matter of this relationship between internal self-definition and external ascription.

Côté and Levine (2002) describe identity as both 'internal' and 'external' to the individual. "It is internal to the extent that it is seen to be subjectively 'constructed' by the individual, but it is external to the extent that this construction is in reference to

'objective' social circumstances provided by day-to-day interactions, social roles, cultural institutions, and social structures" (49). Jenkins (2008 [1996]) describes that what people think about us is not less significant than what we think about ourselves. In everyday social interaction, it is not enough simply to assert an identity, but this assertion must also be validated (or not) by those we come in contact with. Pointing to Erving Goffman's work on identity, Jenkins (2008 [1996]) furthermore stresses that individuals strive to present an image of themselves (internal moment) for validation by others, after which others either accept this presentation or not (external moment). This relationship between internal and external moment, or self-image and public image, is where individual identification emerges.

Except for this internal-external dialectic between self-image and public image, identification is never a unilateral process in a sense that not only do we identify who we are and who other people are, but we are, at the same time, being identified by others. Whose identification matters more, depends on the specific context. "How one identifies oneself – and how one is identified by others – may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 14). Thus, we may be identifying ourselves and others within relational mode of identification (father-daughter, teacher-student relations) or by membership in a specific social category (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.). In some social contexts, our specific identity or identity of others can be strongly emphasized, in others they might be found completely unimportant.

When it comes to internal and external moments of collective identification, it is important to mention two different types of collectives, and hence two different modes of collective identification – *groups* and *categories*. In groups, members are able to identify themselves as such; they are aware of who and what they are. Also, different members can recognize each other's membership status in a specific group, even though they do not know each other personally. On the other side, members may be ignorant of their membership or even of the existence of a particular category. Categories are defined externally, and their nature and composition are decided by the person who defines the category in question (for example, the state can define a category of persons earning wages in a certain range for statistical purposes). Groups, thus, are the product of collective *internal* definition, while categories emerge due to collective *external*

definition. While group identification always implies categorisation, the reverse is not always the case, but remains as an inherent possibility (Jenkins 2008 [1996]).

2.1.3. Similarity and difference

It was mentioned earlier that social identity implies a sense of *similarity* with other members of a specific group or social category, based on a real or perceived salient common feature. However, at the same time as we are defining who we believe we are like, we are also defining who we are unlike. As Jenkins (2006: 395) stresses, “for every ‘me’ or ‘us’, there is a ‘him’ or ‘her’ or a ‘them’; you cannot have one without the other”. In other words, we do not merely associate ourselves with a set of characteristics that define a social group we believe we belong to – we, at the same time, dissociate ourselves from others. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 19) define collective identity as “emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders”. Hence, social identity is connected with the perception of similarities within an in-group, but also with the perception of *differences* between this particular group and the members of other out-groups and categories. These contrasts, as Eriksen (2004) notes, are important for all identification. “Without the other, I cannot be myself; without the others, we cannot be us” (159).

Such defined similarities and differences are nothing but social constructs that exist symbolically in the lives of group members. As Cohen (2001: 21) notes, “this relative similarity or difference is not a matter for ‘objective’ assessment: it is a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves”. Hence, although they recognize important differences among themselves, members of an in-group find themselves more similar to each other than to the members of other out-groups. The feeling of similarity, Cohen further argues, is accomplished through shared *symbols*. Due to their ambiguity and imprecision, symbols serve as an ideal media through which people can form a conviction that they think and behave in a similar way with other members of an in-group, although, in reality, their perception of the shared symbols may vary greatly. Symbols, such as language, rituals, religious beliefs, an emblem, or simply an idea, unite members of an in-group despite their apparent

differences, and generate a sense of shared belonging to a particular social group. This happens not because people see or understand the 'same' symbols in the exact same way, but because their shared symbols allow them to believe that they do (Jenkins 2008 [1996]).

Just like the 'same' symbol can mean different things to different people, a group which they feel they belong to, and their collective identity attached to it, is itself a symbolic construct. Cohen (2001: 20) stresses that "the '*commonality*' which is found in community need not be a uniformity. It does not clone behaviour or ideas. It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members". Therefore, one collective identity can be the same in its name ('nominal identity'), but it can be experienced differently by each of its members and have different consequences for their lives ('virtual identity') (Jenkins 2008 [1996]).

2.1.4. Boundaries

In his influential Introduction into *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Fredrik Barth argues that ethnic differences are not simply a product of cultural differences between different ethnic groups, and that what actually matters are *boundaries* between them. In other words, it is the boundary that defines the group (*social* boundary, although it may have territorial counterparts), and not the specific cultural content or "cultural stuff" that this particular group encloses (15). Although this framework has analysed *ethnic* identification in particular, it is also applicable to other forms of collective identification (Jenkins 2008 [1996]).

Following Barth's analysis, social identity can be understood as a product of the process of boundary formation between ourselves and others. Social identities are being created, confirmed and negotiated in the process of *interaction* across the boundaries between individuals who identify themselves collectively in different ways. The existence and persistence of a particular group is dependent upon the existence of other groups and upon maintenance of boundaries between them. Social boundaries are not tangible and territorially determined, but are rather elusive and can be found in interaction between people. As such, they presuppose the encounter between internal

(‘us’) and external (‘them’) moment of identification, as well as an interplay between similarity (who we are like) and difference (who we are alike).

Cohen (2001: 69) stresses that people become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries, “when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture”. The boundaries define the group in relation to other groups: “...*all* social identities, collective and individual, are constituted in this way, ‘to play the vis-à-vis’” (58). Hence, cultural differences between groups are not a consequence of their spatial and social segregation, but, quite the opposite, they become evident through interaction across the boundaries. As a consequence, we should not be looking into ‘content’ of a specific group identity, but shift our focus of investigation to processes of social boundary maintenance and group recruitment (Jenkins 2008 [1996]). Also, social boundaries are permeable and they are persisting despite the flow of personnel across them. In other words, collective entities are independent of the individuals whose membership constitutes them (Barth 1969).

Furthermore, as Cohen (2001) argues, just like the collective entity (or ‘community’) is symbolically constructed, so are its social boundaries. The distinctiveness between groups and ‘reality’ of their boundaries lie in the minds of the members of these groups, in meanings they attach to it. In other words,

...not all boundaries, and not *all* the components of *any* boundary, are so objectively apparent. They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of their beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side (Cohen 2001: 12).

Social boundaries can be defined as being flexible, relational and situational. This means that they can be invoked with respect to some groups, under certain circumstances and for some purposes, but not for some other, or they may be obvious to one group, but imperceptible to other (Cohen 1994; 2001). “Identification changes depending on who one currently has a relationship with” (Eriksen 2004: 160). Also, in defining our identity vis-à-vis others, selection of boundary markers is completely arbitrary (Eriksen 2010 [1994]). We highlight certain differences as we consider them important in a specific social context, and, as a consequence, only these differences become socially relevant:

The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant (...) some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied (Barth 1969: 14).

2.1.5. 'Us' vs. 'them'

Through recognition of certain similarities in perception and evaluation of the world with other in-group members, a person feels a strong positive emotional connection with the group. In social psychology, Tajfel and Turner (1986) stress that individuals strive to enhance their self-esteem and within it achieve or maintain positive social identity. This positive social identity is largely based on favourable comparisons that can be made between an in-group ('us') and relevant out-groups ('them').

There are three basic elements in this process. First, through recognition of different social categories that people belong to (e.g. white, professor, woman, Arab, Hindu, Democrat), we are capable of identifying and understanding ourselves and others, and adjusting our behaviour accordingly (*social categorisation*). The second element (*social identification*) presupposes cognitive consequences of the involvement of self in the mentioned categorization process. We accept the category we belong to on emotional, cognitive, and behavioural levels and subjectively identify with the relevant in-group. As a consequence, we attach emotional significance to that identification, and our self-esteem becomes dependent on it. Third, after social categorisation and social identification process, we tend to engage into *social comparison* between our in-group and another out-group, as "social comparison is perhaps the only way we can assess the true meaning or value of our own group" (Spears 2011: 203). Although social comparison is not inherently a competitive process, strong identification and attribution of positive identity to one's own group often leads to in-group favouritism and attribution of negative identities to other out-groups. In order to maintain its positive group distinctiveness and self-esteem, the in-group is compared favourably against other ones, which can result in negative stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, or even intergroup conflict. Also, in the process of intergroup social comparison, there is

a tendency to minimize the perception of differences between in-group members, as well as to maximize intergroup distinctiveness, especially on those dimensions which reflect positively upon in-group (Hogg and Abrams 1998).

Brewer (2001) notes that the more similar groups are in their values and aspirations, the more acute the intergroup social competition. When there is a single dimension of evaluation equally important and relevant to both groups' collective self-esteem, in a context of self-enhancement motives, out-group accomplishments are seen as a threat to in-group position. Thus, "the closer the out-group, the greater the threat" (25). Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 479) stresses that "social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat". Referring to Freud's notion of 'the narcissism of small differences', Blok (1998) underlines that it is precisely the minor differences between otherwise very similar groups that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them.

One such example can be found in Elias' and Scotson's study on Winston Parva (1994 [1965]) which addresses the question of how a group of people can monopolise power channels and use them to exclude and stigmatise members of another, very similar group. The two groups in question ('the established' and 'the outsiders') do not differ with regards to their nationality, ethnic descent, race, type of occupation, income, educational level, social class, religion; the only difference, though, is in duration of their residence, in 'oldness' of their association with the place and people attached to that place. Duration of residence has been of crucial importance for creation of the group cohesion and positive collective identification of the established group. This furthermore helped them in excluding and stigmatising the outsiders (newcomers), all in order to maintain their identity, assert superiority, and keep others firmly in place, as the newcomers were perceived as a threat to the way of life of the established group.

2.2. Identity and forcible displacement

Forcibly displaced persons are the persons who leave or flee their homes due to actual or potential threat of violence or persecution, and find rescue in another place within or outside their own state. Those who seek refuge from persecution outside their own

country become refugees, while those do not cross an internationally recognised state border are known as internally displaced persons (IDPs). People who face such an abrupt and radical change in their lives share a common experience of disruption and loss. Among other, this includes the loss of home and place, social and kinship networks, as well as loss of different roles they used to play in a particular society, through which they were evaluated and valued as individuals (Colson 2003). The sense of loss, coupled with painful process of adaptation to unfamiliar social circumstances, triggers feelings of powerlessness and alienation, thus making the forced displacement one of the “most profoundly disturbing human experiences” (Zetter 1988: 1).

Stepping into new physical and social environment, especially if done involuntarily, can significantly alter the existing perceptions of self and others. Renegotiation of social relationships, definition and redefinition of different social identities and emergence of new social boundaries, are inevitable processes which follow the mass population displacement.

2.1.1. The sense of loss

A variety of factors, including age, gender, class, particular stage in life, the nature of resettlement, duration of displacement, or the state policies concerning forcibly expelled population, influence displacement experience and a person’s coping with such predicament. In some instances, even geographical factors can play an important role in facilitating the process of personal adjustment upon involuntary displacement. While attempting to explain a high degree of assimilation of Greek refugees in Lesvos, Hirschon (2007) suggested that for this particular displaced group of people it was the immediate proximity of their hometown Ayvalik, the familiarity of the landscape and terrain, the climate, and very similar economic activities, that helped in minimizing the stresses and challenges after the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey (1923)⁴.

⁴ On 30 January 1923, following the end of the First World War and Greece's unsuccessful military campaign in Anatolia, Greece and Turkey signed The Lausanne Convention which specified the conditions for the compulsory exchange of minority populations between these two countries. The aim of this agreement was to create ethnically homogeneous territories and presumably prevent any future conflicts, thus improving regional stability. The compulsory exchange of minority populations involved the movement of about 1.5 million people, 1.2 million of which were Orthodox Christians who left their

What is common for majority of forcibly displaced persons, however, is their pronounced sense of loss, which is especially omnipresent in the early periods of displacement. Peter Loizos' book *The heart grown bitter* (1981), which recorded the stories of the Greek Cypriot refugees from the village of Argaki shortly after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, is a testimony to what it means to suddenly become a refugee, and how forcible displacement influences identities of those who were pressured to flee their homes and leave everything behind. Loizos admitted that he was struck by the strength of the villagers' preoccupation with loss. The Argaki villagers grieved for lost houses, land, and other material possessions, but these were only the epitomes of the lost security, economic independence and the specific rural community's lifestyle, without which the refugees felt not only economically and socially disoriented, but also deeply humiliated and irretrievably demoralized. As Loizos argued elsewhere (1977: 234) referring to the Argaki refugees, "they did not lose merely houses in the material sense of buildings with walls, roofs, of a particular size and value. They lost homes – unique places in which many of their most important social experiences had taken place." In other words, rather than losing the simple material objects, the refugees lost key structures of meaning in their lives. The sense of loss was even more pronounced among the Argaki women. Due to traditional gender roles in Greek society, they felt a stronger attachment to their households, as well as to the compact community of kin, friends and neighbours which had largely sustained their lives in the village (Loizos 1981).

Together with categorisation imposed by the state administration and mass media, and usually pejorative labelling by non-refugee population, it was precisely this distinct kind of common distress that helped the displaced Argaki villagers in forming a specific refugee identity. Perceiving their pain to be of the same kind, the refugees offered to each other sympathy and support that could neither be understood nor properly expressed by the non-refugee population. "It takes a refugee to understand one", was a frequently expressed sentiment among the displaced Argaki villagers (Loizos 1981: 127, 183). Similarly, Pilkington (1998) documented a distinguished collective identity among Russian-speaking forced migrants and refugees in the Russian

homes in Turkey and arrived to Greece, while approximately 350,000 Muslims from the Greek state were received by Turkey. This involuntary movement of population has had profound long-term consequences for the two countries' politics, economy, society and culture, and has severely shaken the lives of the displaced population on both sides (see, e.g. Clark 2006; Hirschon 2003)

Federation, which was most obviously rooted in their shared current problems and their empathy for each other's tribulations. As one of her informants stressed, "...we can tell each other at a distance. This pain is a single pain felt by everyone" (167). These displaced persons bonded over similar emotional predicament and came to play for each other the role of the family and friendship networks they have left behind. For Argaki refugees from Loizos (1981; also 1977) study, Turkish invasion of Cyprus and population displacement have also stimulated the growth of a new regional identity. The Argaki refugees felt stronger connection with their neighbours from the wider home region, even though, prior to displacement, there was a little sense of regional loyalties and identifications. Although the Greek Cypriots from neighbouring villages used to be competitors for resources and rivals in matters of prestige, these old antagonisms have lost their meaning due to this population's common shattering displacement experience.

While revisiting the Argaki community three decades after their displacement, Loizos (2008) noted that majority of these refugees have successfully moved on with their lives in spite of the initially devastating displacement experience. While in the early years after displacement the Argaki villagers felt disoriented and preoccupied with their material and other losses, 30 years later they "came to terms with that disruption and in many ways transcended it" (3). However, there still existed the sense of a separate refugee identity and the submerged feeling of grievances over the lost homes, land, and rich communal social life. The fact that they have managed to reconstruct their lives, does not mean that they completely got over the loss of the places they loved. These feelings could not be easily grasped by others, as they were "protected by the thick processes of normal life" (186), but this did not make them less real. Loizos used the metaphor "iron in the soul" to describe this distinct emotional condition of the Argaki refugees in Cyprus after the long-term displacement experience:

It may help to think of the experience of displacement and its negative memories as being like a splinter of iron which has been trapped inside the now-healed flesh and causes no difficulty until inadvertently pressed, when there will [be] sharp reactive pain. [...] It would seem to be the case that as time goes by, more and more refugees spend more and more time with their refugee identity "switched off." If something happens to "switch it on" then the sense of

grievance returns to the surface in full strength – the iron is still in both the heart and soul (Loizos 2008: 186).

2.1.2. The role of memory

With the pronounced sense of loss and disruption while finding themselves in an unfamiliar physical and social environment, forcible displaced people suddenly feel as if they do not have control over their lives. After their life trajectories were interrupted and many components of their former identities were forcibly taken away, their present becomes disorderly, and their future highly uncertain. Under such circumstances, memory plays a role of medium through which displaced persons can regain the sense of continuity with the accustomed past lives, alongside which their identities can be reconstructed, and their feelings of belonging restored. Collective processes of memory management, therefore, contribute to social continuity (Loizos 1999).

In her study on social life of Asia Minor refugees in the Athenian suburb of Kokkinia, Hirschon (1998 [1989]) stressed the importance of shared memories and narratives of the past for cultural survival and identity preservation of this particular group of refugees. The sense of identity of the Asia Minor refugees had a distinctly cultural dimension and was rooted in their religious affiliation, cosmopolitan heritage, and their attachment to regional character and place of origin. Collective memories of their lost homeland and frequent and vivid references to their past lives, played a major role in establishing the 'imagined community' of *Mikrasiates* (Greek people from Asia Minor). Even 50 years after displacement, *Mikrasiates* in Kokkinia clearly distinguished themselves from the local Greek population, with whom they shared the same ethnicity, language and religion (also Hirschon 2004). Similarly, Koufopoulou (2003; also Clark 2006) recorded a 75 year-long maintenance of a distinctive Cretan identity among the Muslims from the Greek island of Crete who were forcibly relocated to the Turkish island of Cunda. Particular identity markers related to their pre-displacement lives, i.e. the specific *Kritika* dialect they spoke, their characteristic cuisine, the dress code, as well as their "innate sense of Europeanness" (217), were some of the most important cultural elements which promoted their separate identity, that became the central focus of their interaction with other Turks.

Another way in which forcibly displaced persons attempt to invoke a sense of continuity with their past lives, refers to their efforts to replicate their spatial and environmental heritage in the new settlement sites. Stelaku (2003) noted that the Greek refugees from Cappadocia (Turkey) achieved this sense of continuity through naming their new settlements in Greece after places left behind in Turkey (with the addition of the word 'new', as in New Karvali and New Prokopi), through preservation of sacred relics they brought with themselves from Cappadocia, as well as through retention of the church as a focal point of their sociocultural life. The newly-built churches which dominated the landscape of these refugees' settlements were dedicated to the same saints as in the refugees' home villages, and their architecture and building style resembled the one at home. In this way, through appropriation of the new physical environment and its adjustment to their social, religious, and cultural heritage, the Cappadocian refugees "changed the inaccessible and unknown 'space' into a familiar and recognisable 'place'" which they could more easily be identified with (191). As a consequence, these churches, together with other buildings related to the refugees' tradition which got constructed in the meantime, became the main symbol of the refugees' culture, invoking the sense of security and stability, and creating a much-needed feeling of belonging.

Similar practices could be observed among the Asia Minor refugees in Kokkinia, who perceived the re-creation of familiar places as a central element in the process of adjustment to the changed sociocultural context, and as a means for establishing a basis for social life. As it was the case with Cappadocian refugees from Stelaku's study (2003), as well as other Asia Minor refugees all over rural Greece, refugee settlements in Kokkinia were called by their homeland names, street names recalled homeland localities, while churches were dedicated in memory of the sanctuaries abandoned in the homeland (Hirschon 2014). Hirschon (2014; also 1998 [1989]) also documented how Kokkinia refugees differentiated between various refugee neighbourhoods based on the origins of their residents, employing specific Asia Minor regional stereotypes. Through attribution of stereotypical regional characteristics which predated their displacement experience, these refugees created what can be identified as a kind of "social landscape geography" (58), which served as a means of familiarisation and personalisation of the otherwise alien social environment, in which they unwillingly found themselves upon forcible displacement. Various associations, commissions and

cultural centres founded by Asia Minor Greeks, as well as monuments built in memory of their displacement experience, have also played the role of “mediators of memory” and as a means of imagination of refugee community for this particular group of displaced people (Alpan 2012: 220).

2.1.3. Forcibly displaced and their hosts

In addition to being humanitarian labels, refugee and IDP categories also become social categories and identities on the ground, capable of persisting and shaping relationships between host communities and newcomers, even after the policymakers no longer recognize displaced persons as such (Brun 2003, 2010; Dunkan 2005). Being labelled as a refugee or an IDP has consequences in real life, as labels have a capacity to convey a complex set of values and judgements and subsequently form, transform or manipulate identities (Zetter 1991; 2007).

How are displaced people going to be affected by such labelling process, and how it is going to determine their identification of selves and others, depends on a variety of factors. Demetriou (2014, 2018) explained how legal and political spheres have determined the experiential and subjective constitution of ‘refugeehood’ in Cyprus, whereby only Greek-Cypriots who got displaced in 1974 were considered ‘real’ refugees and were, consequently, given access to different rights and benefits in order to rebuild their lives after forcible displacement. At the same time, having displacement qualified as an ethnic attribute and the label ‘refugee’ understood as “the victimized condition of the national self” (Demetriou 2018: 10), some other categories of Cypriot population – such as Armenians, Maronites and Latins– who experienced forcible displacement prior to the Turkish occupation of the island in 1974, were labelled as *Tourkóplikti* (those struck by the Turks), and were ascribed a ‘lesser-victim’ status and treated differently by official discourse and practice. Voutira (2003) suggested that in Greece the term ‘refugee’ has attained positive connotations, and is used as a symbol of honour and pride. The specific historical and political context in which the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey took place, as well as the Greek state policies which recognized Asia Minor refugees as a national asset that could contribute to modern

Greek economic, social and cultural development, were some of the most important factors which helped in forming the collective perception that integration of Asia Minor refugees was ultimately successful. This, in turn, has given rise to a positive understanding of the very term 'refugee'. However, positive perception of the term 'refugee' in Greece has not occurred neither fast nor easily (see below), and it remains highly selective. It has in mind only the Greek refugees from Asia Minor in the context of the Greco-Turkish compulsory exchange of populations, while some other subsequent co-ethnic newcomers, such as the Greek immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, tended to be seen in a less favourable light both by policymakers and by the local Greek population (Voutira 2003, 2003a).

Despite the fact that positive examples as the one above do exist, contemporary constructions of the terms 'refugee' or 'IDP' are usually based on negative image of these categories of population. As Vigil and Abidi (2018), argue, in contemporary world, the label 'refugee' is often used by states to dehumanize refugees and to garner support for securitized refugee policies, thus often resulting in the failure to recognize the humanity of refugees. The receiver state and other authorities tend to perceive displaced persons as an economic burden and liability, seeing them through the prism of their vulnerability, while missing to recognize displaced people's multiple identities which are not strictly related to their displacement experience. Local communities too feel endangered by the arrival of displaced persons on a mass scale, which affects identification processes of both of these population groups, and usually one at the expense of the other. Refugees and IDPs, at least in the initial stage of their displacement, become 'newcomers', or, to use Elias' and Scotson's (1994 [1965]) category - 'outsiders', in their new social environments. On the other side, receiver communities obtain the role of hosts, which very often occurs as abruptly and unwillingly as the displacement itself. The newcomers and their hosts recognize each other as a threat to their established definitions of selves and all that this definitions entail. Consequently, adjustment to the new state of affairs becomes a two-way process in which each of these communities must learn how to cope with the suddenly changed social circumstances. The fact that the two communities in question can share a wide set of important characteristics (such as race, ethnicity, religion or language) does not necessarily result in a quick and smooth accommodation to the new sociocultural context. Quite the contrary - the more similar the groups, the greater the threat, and

greater the need to increase one group's self-esteem through overemphasizing minimal intergroup differences and discriminating against members of another group.

Positive self-perception, intergroup cohesion and intragroup boundaries are usually strengthened through stereotypes, i.e. "simplistic descriptions of cultural traits in other groups which are conventionally believed to exist" (Eriksen 2001 [1995]: 264). Stereotypes represent value-judgement concepts which tend to make over-generalizations about certain characteristics of members of a particular group, thus refusing to take individual variations into account. Stereotypes are crucial in defining the boundaries of one's own group, in many instances implying this group's superiority in relation to others, and justifying its privileges and differences in access to a society's resources (Eriksen 2010 [1994]).

2.2.1.1. Economic competition

One of the primary sources of tension between local and displaced population is the question of who is going to obtain the monopoly over principal sources of power available in a given society.⁵ In many instances, the competition concerning economic resources resurfaces as the most relevant one, as the arrival of a large group of newcomers puts pressure on local labour market, threatening the established feelings of security, and shaking the existing balance of power. As Clark (2006: 182) observed in the case of Turkish refugees in Tuzla (Turkey), the confrontation between the locals and the newcomers represented simply "a squabble between two nervous and introverted groups of people over a finite amount of economic assets".

Using the example of internal displacement of Northern Muslims in Sri Lanka, Brun (2003) explained how shortly after an initially warm welcome, the IDPs and their co-ethnic hosts in Puttalam managed to build effective boundaries between themselves. These boundaries were not only physical, embedded in the segregated settlement patterns, but also symbolic, based on a belief that IDPs represent a threat to the local population's established position in the society. The perceived threat was primarily

⁵ These findings could be associated with realistic conflict theory in social psychology (Sherif et al. 1954/1961) which established that the competitive situation between individuals (such as the competition for limited resources) leads to greater differentiation between them. This furthermore leads to the formation of competing social groups, employment of negative prejudices and stereotypes between them, as well to the inter-group conflicts.

economic in its nature, mostly felt by the poorer segments of the receiver community, and it concerned competition over scarce resources, such as land and labour. Likewise, the research conducted by Dunkan (2005) in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, showed how the local population developed a number of stereotypes about the IDPs based on the fact that the latter ones were receiving aid from the government and foreign and national NGOs. Not only that the locals felt economically discriminated by the government, but they also blamed the IDPs for putting the locals in a seemingly more disadvantaged position. As a result, they attached several derogatory characteristics to the IDPs, ranging from being lazy and too selective in choosing their employment, to being ungrateful, quarrelsome, and prone to criminal activities.

In her study on political mobilisation of ethnic Serb refugees who settled in Serbia after fleeing the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragojević (2010) emphasized the relevance of economic factors in creating cleavages between the local and the incoming population. The locals vocalized their perceptions of the influx of refugees as an economic threat to their own jobs and general economic wellbeing. They believed that these refugees are better off economically than the local population, and that they enjoy an unfair advantage when it comes to employment opportunities or their children's admission to schools. What is more, Dragojević's informants were of an opinion that the refugees acquired property and possessions in a dishonest manner. They even made distinction between "real" refugees who live in refugee camps, and the "self-proclaimed" refugees who settled in their locality and built enormous "villas", supposedly using large amounts of stolen money and looted goods from the war areas (166).

In certain local societies, the power is not derived from economic assets only, but from some other factors, such as monopoly over key positions in local institutions, from greater cohesion and solidarity, greater uniformity and elaboration of norms and beliefs, or greater group discipline. The local population in the Croatian village of Gradina saw their co-ethnic newcomers from the Serbian province of Vojvodina as a threat to their position in society. The native Gradina Croats felt politically and socially marginalized by their former Serb neighbours, and now, after the Serbs left their village and Croats from Vojvodina filled in their place, they feared that the newcomers were going to take the former position of the Serbs in the social hierarchy. The newcomers' superior behaviour, especially discernible through their attitude towards labour and

their entrepreneurial spirit, additionally strengthened this concern and consolidated inferiority feeling of the local Croat population (Čapo-Žmegač 2007).

2.2.1.2. Cultural differences

Differences between locals and newcomers, or divisions between 'us' and 'them' in the context of forcible displacement, are probably most apparent in socio-cultural field. Even when these cleavages are primarily formed out of competition for scarce resources, the conflicts which arise are usually manifested in ascription of negative cultural and personality traits to the threatening out-group. Although the groups in question can share a number of 'same' nominal identities which they both find important in a given social context, these similarities appear superficial in comparison to perceived differences between them, which might be based on class, education, occupation, or simply on duration of stay in a particular local setting. This is one of the main reasons why those people who flee from ethnically-based violence feel like strangers upon displacement, in spite of being united with their co-ethnic hosts. Several different studies use this word 'stranger' to describe the cases of involuntary displacement to people's 'ethnic homelands': Hirschon's (1998 [1989]: 4) Asia Minor refugees were "strangers at home", a Greek and a Turkish refugee in Clark's (2006) study was "twice a stranger", while Čapo-Žmegač's (2007) co-ethnic migrants in Croatia were described as "strangers either way". In some cases, this feeling of 'being a stranger' comes as a result of refugees and IDPs feeling 'lost' in a completely unknown physical and social environment, especially in the early displacement period. Having in mind that social identification is both internal and external process (see above), in other instances, it is the new social environment and local population's attitude towards newcomers that label refugees and IDPs as 'strangers' or 'others', to the point that they indeed start feeling like ones. While certain differences between locals and newcomers unavoidably exist, this process of producing otherness can be real or imagined and is largely discursive, serving the purpose of creating 'us' and 'them', or, more concretely, 'us' versus 'them'.

Following the Treaty of Lausanne which specified an unprecedented compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1923, around 1.2 million

Orthodox Christians left their homes in Turkey and arrived to Greece, while approximately 350,000 Muslims from the Greek state were received by Turkey (Hirschon 2003). The incoming population on both sides was highly diversified in terms of their wealth, type of occupation, urban-rural origin, language, dialect, and regional cultural patterns. Nevertheless, what majority of these newcomers had in common was their close cultural encounter with the local population, which more often than not led to hostility and rejection. Due to the fact that the newcomers had lived among members of another, enemy ethnic group, and sometimes spoke only their language, the Greek Orthodox Christians from Asia Minor were pejoratively named “Turkish seeds” [*Tourkosporoi*], while the equivalent insult for Muslims who arrived to Turkey was “half infidels” [*Yari gavur*] (Clark 2006; Hirschon 2003; Koufopoulou 2003). Given such attitude of the local population, the newcomers were often put in a position where they needed to continuously demonstrate loyalty to their own ethnic and religious communities. Koufopoulou (2003) noted that Cretan Muslims displaced to Turkey became more religious in an effort to be accepted by the local population, and in order to prove their national and religious credentials. Other than this, the locals in Greece considered the newcomers to be culturally “alien” and “different”, calling them “lousy” and “dirty”, and preventing them from entering the local churches (Köker 2003: 201; Stelaku 2003: 189). Clark (2006) documented that local population in Turkey avoided social interaction with their co-ethnic newcomers to the extent that they went to different mosques and used different water pumps. The locals even complained about refugees’ dress code, or their habit to drink soup instead of tea for breakfast. This, as Clark (2006: 181) furthermore points out, is a clear example of Freud’s ‘narcissism of small differences’, whereby “in the absence of big contrasts, petty ones are often exaggerated”.

A research conducted by Duijzings (1995) concerning displacement of Croats from majority-Albanian Kosovo to Western Slavonia in Croatia, suggested that this displaced group of people had huge problems in adjusting to the new social environment, in which they were not accepted by the native Croat population. The locals considered their co-ethnic newcomers to be “dirty”, “impulsive” and “unreliable”, and disputed their decision to resettle in this particular area, as they were seen as “oriental’ Croats who are not and simply never will be part of the civilized world” (58). Another research conducted among the Croats from northern Serbia who, due to the

war in the 1990s, resettled in Croatia, analysed the boundaries between locals and newcomers, which, among other, resulted in differentiation of 'good' from 'bad' Croats. At the time when national identification imposed itself as the dominant identifying marker of the majority of Croat citizens in Croatia, the newcomers could not qualify as 'good' Croats, as they were perceived as being 'contaminated' (in sphere of language, religious practices, customs, etc.) by living among the Serbs in Serbia (Čapo-Žmegač 2007). The newcomers from Dragojević's (2010) study were blamed for bringing with them a different sub-culture, which, according to the local population, was "primitive", and manifested itself in different customs, family upbringing, clothing, or musical preferences. In addition, according to some of Dragojević's respondents, instead of adapting to their new social environment, refugees actually changed the local population's established lifestyle according to their own tastes and customs, making it less "clean" and less "urban" than it used to be before (168-169).

2.2.1.3. Reverse stereotyping

Arrival of a large group of displaced persons to a particular society influences identification process of both principal categories of population: the locals and the newcomers. Displaced people, as well as their hosts, negotiate and renegotiate their collective identities through process of social comparison, boosting their self-esteem while presenting the members of another group as being inferior in those dimensions of evaluation which are considered to be the most important. Hence, rather than being the mere objects of stereotyping, the newcomers are active participants in this process.

Hirschon's (1998 [1989]) Asia Minor Greeks in Kokkinia, although entrenched at the bottom of the social and economic scale, viewed themselves as distinct, but also as culturally superior to the Greek population they found in mainland Greece. Although they were resettled among the Orthodox Christian population like themselves, the Asia Minor Greeks believed that they were more observant and devout than the locals, and emphasized their superiority in lifestyle, manners, comportment, and cuisine. They attached several derogatory characteristics to the local Greeks, considering them to be "uncultured", "rough", "boorish", "ignorant of the way of others", "backward" and "crude" (Hirschon 1998 [1989]: 31-33; Hirschon 2006: 66). Furthermore, they stressed

that most of the advances made in Greek life were introduced by the refugees, starting from the way the locals speak, dress and eat, to the way in which they use their entrepreneurial skills.

Russian-speaking population displaced from the former republics of the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation, considered their 'Soviet work ethic' to be one the most important aspect of their identity, which clearly distinguished them from the local Russian population. They saw themselves as harder and better workers than the local Russians, who, on the other side, were perceived as "drunkards" and "layabouts" who failed to improve their living standard through hard and dedicated work (Pilkington 1998: 168). The perceived inferiority of the local Russians vis-à-vis the incoming Russian population was also reflected in everyday cultural practices. The newcomers described the locals as "rude", "disrespectful", "linguistically impoverished", "drunken" and "lazy", and as uncultured people who lack the basic "upbringing" (*vospitanie*) (169-170). Similarly, the alleged superiority of the displaced Srijem Croats in Čapo-Žmegač's study (2007) primarily referred to economic issues. According to these newcomers to the Croatian village of Gradina, economic activities and work ethic were some of the most prominent points of differentiation between them and the local Croats. The newcomers believed that they brought a new, better approach to labour to their new social environment, which is, above all, characterized by their hard work and resourcefulness. The locals were perceived as backward in other areas of life as well - the characteristics of villages, households, traditions, language and mentality, being some of the most emphasized ones.

The aforementioned studies point to another important finding, and that is the fact that ethnicity does not seem to be a determining principle of identity in the cases of co-ethnic migration. In these studies, the common ethnic affiliation of the locals and the newcomers did not prevent either of these two groups from treating each other as strangers, and from developing a number of stereotypes which aimed at presenting the other group as socially and culturally inferior. Therefore, shared ethnic (national) identity does not represent a sufficient factor for guaranteeing the newcomers' quick incorporation into their new physical and social environment.

2.3. New identities, new cleavages in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina

The 1992-1995 violent conflict has greatly affected the ethno-national identifications of Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens, but it has also made an impact on a large range of other categories, such as gender, class, generation, urbanity/rurality, and occupation (Bougarel et al. 2007). Moreover, due to the war and population displacement, new social categories have come into existence, in relation to which the identities of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina got shaped and reshaped. Among other, these categories include war veterans, families of fallen soldiers and missing persons, civilian victims of various war crimes, internally displaced persons, returnees, those who fled the country, those who stayed behind, those who resettled, and so on. Different groups and categories have often had clashing interests and demands that have furthermore led to the amplification of the existing, or the emergence of the new social cleavages within the BiH society.

2.1.4. Stayees and returnees

Sorabji (2006) noted a tendency of Bosniak population in post-war Sarajevo to downplay status divisions among themselves which were more than evident in the years which preceded the war. One of the reasons for this was based in the fact they all faced some common 'threats' embedded in different 'others', such as corrupted business-political elites, co-ethnic IDPs from rural areas, or newly-emerging religious believers who, in their view, have adopted a version of Islam which could not be associated with Sarajevan values and spirit. Another reason behind the formed sense of a common collective identity among Sorabji's informants, in spite of their obvious differences, was grounded in their shared experience of remaining in Sarajevo during the war, in contrast with all those who decided to flee the city and return after the war was over. The former ones are often referred to as 'stayees', while the latter ones belong to the category of returnees.

Despite their shared ethnicity, religion and language, some Bosnian citizens who stayed in their towns during the war have felt a significant social distance from those

who fled the country and later on returned. Stayees have believed that their emotional, but also economic troubles have been greater and more severe than of those who found refuge abroad, which puts them in disadvantage while competing over scarce resources once these refugees return (Pickering 2007; also Čengiđ 2016; Jansen 2011). Maček (2009) documented a widespread notion among stayees in Sarajevo that, due to their greater contribution during the war, they should be given better opportunities than returnees, especially when it comes to employment. Among other, the rift between stayees and returnees in wartime Sarajevo came out as a result of a violation of trust between them, as neither group could know with certainty whether the other one – during the war or exile– betrayed those values that were common source of pride for all pre-war Sarajevans (such as non-nationalism, secularism, cosmopolitanism, etc.).

In his study on refugee return to Sarajevo, Stefansson (2004a; 2007) explained how ethnic polarisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina seemed to be less problematic than some other social divisions, including the relationship between urban ('cultured') and rural ('uncultured') population, locals and newcomers, or returnees ('deserters') and stayees ('patriots'). Returnees felt that they were experiencing structural discrimination in labour and housing market, because some other categories of population, i.e. war veterans, fallen soldiers' family members or IDPs, were in practice favoured by the authorities. Stayees in Sarajevo were accusing returnees of betrayal and cowardice for fleeing the city (also Maček 2009), while returnees, on the other side, resented stayees for deciding to remain in the country and presumably participate in war atrocities just in order to save their jobs and houses. In addition, the rivalry between those who stayed and those who returned surrounded the question of which of the two groups has "the monopoly of suffering" and therefore possesses a moral, and with it any other superiority within the changed political and socio-economic reality in Bosnia (Stefansson 2004a; 2004b).

2.1.5. Locals and newcomers

Due to a considerable number of IDPs who decided to resettle in the areas dominated by their own ethnic group, local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have experienced profound changes in demographic, political, socio-economic and cultural aspects, which

has greatly impacted these localities' everyday functioning. A negative stigmatisation of the IDPs by the local population and vice versa has been a commonplace throughout the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as wider region of the former Yugoslavia affected by the war and population displacement (see e.g. Čapo-Žmegač 2007, Dragojević 2010; Duijzings 1996; Jansen 2005).

In the post-war period of overall socio-economic uncertainty and insecurity, locals and newcomers have been accusing each other of monopolizing jobs and resorting to shady deals with local politicians and civil servants in order to expand their social networks and achieve various socio-economic privileges. Consequently, each group tended to feel politically and economically marginalized by the other. However, although cleavages among these groups have a strong socio-economic dimension, they have usually been interpreted in terms of cultural, moral, or political categories (Poggi et al. 2002). Moreover, they have been followed by a very pronounced urban-rural element of distinction. Local population of urban origin associated rural newcomers with lack of 'culture', meaning that they perceived their co-ethnics from rural areas as, among other, uneducated, backward, primitive, poor, traditional, religious and nationalistic. A striking presence of such stereotypes has led to the conclusion that the urban-rural dichotomy largely shapes social relations in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, in spite of an apparent dominance of ethno-national categories.

Pickering's (2007: 76) research in Sarajevo and Bihać discovered that urbanites of all backgrounds expressed "clear distance" from those who were displaced from rural areas to the city. Due to these IDPs' "different upbringing" and "political outlook", as well as lack of cosmopolitanism and "mutual respect for difference", the locals established only superficial relations with the newcomers (77, 119). An IDP label carried a negative stigma as it was associated with "homeless, impoverished people of an 'uncultured', rural background" who bring with them criminality, political and religious extremism, nationalism, cultural primitivism, improper language, even corruption and nepotism (Stefansson 2006: 129). Informants from the urban centres often stressed that because of these newcomers, the sophisticated outlook of the pre-war modern urban space has been inevitably degenerated and spoiled. In the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, where rivalry between the town and the countryside mentality has been the most pervasive, the locals portrayed themselves as "cultural strangers' within their own city", while the city itself, because of "an invasion" of rural population, became

an “urban exile”, deprived of its basic civilised and cultured values (Stefansson 2007: 60; also 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Maček’s (2009: 180) research in Sarajevo also revealed a widespread belief that the newcomers are “difficult” and “rough folk” who, through solidifying their primitive style of living, imposed threat to secularised urban culture and pluralist, non-nationalistic Sarajevo milieu.

Although rarely documented in research studies on post-war Bosnia, stigmatisation and stereotyping have also had the reverse forms, in which the roles of the locals and newcomers have been replaced. Stressing again importance of urban-rural distinctions in Bosnia, Armakolas (2007) discovered among his informants relocated from (urban) Sarajevo to (rural) Pale a hesitation, at instances total rejection, in accepting their new environment, local culture and people. The displaced people, especially young generations, complained about “backwardness” of the local people, their “lack of style”, or their “funny preferences when it comes to entertainment” (89).

What is more, many Bosnians and Herzegovinians of urban background have believed that it was the rural population that started the war in the first place, blaming it not only for all the war crimes and atrocities, but for deliberate destruction of urban space and urban values, as well. Urban Bosnians were of an opinion that violence was brought from the provincial, backward and less ‘cultured’ parts of the country, and that some of the most prominent ethno-nationalistic political and (para)military leaders actually originated from such areas, which explains their inflammatory rhetoric and aggressive actions (Armakolas 2001; Bougarel 1999; Graves 2017; Kolind 2008; Sorabji 2006; Stefansson 2007). Thus, in a popular imaginary of Bosnian urbanites, the very war was almost exclusively portrayed as a conflict between urban and rural, ‘cultured’ and ‘uncultured’, civilized and barbarian, progressive and primitive, cosmopolitan and narrow-minded, and characterized as a “peasant rebellion” (Maček 2009: 188) or “revenge of the countryside” (Bougarel 1999). This perception was furthermore taken by Western media and academia alike which very often uncritically read the Bosnian conflict in terms of a cultural struggle between these two types of population (Graves 2017).⁶

⁶ For a more elaborate and critical examination of such a view, see, for example: Allcock, John B. (2002): Rural-urban differences and the break-up of Yugoslavia, *Balkanologie* VI (1-2), December 2002, av. at: <http://balkanologie.revues.org/447>; Bougarel, Xavier (1999): Yugoslav wars: The "revenge of the countryside" between sociological reality and nationalist myth, *East European Quarterly*, vol. XXXIII, no. 2, pp. 157-175; Graves, Ryan J. (2017): Mountain Militarism and Urban Modernity: Balkanism, Identity and the Discourse of Urban-Rural Cleavages during the Bosnian War, *Simons Papers in Security and*

The cultural dichotomy between urban and rural, which has greatly dominated the relationship between local population and IDPs in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, does not represent a new phenomenon. Due to the socialist Yugoslav preferential treatment of city that went along with the government's vision of modernisation through rapid industrialisation and subsequent urbanisation, the economic, social and cultural gap between the city and the village inevitably deepened. Aiming to enter modern world as soon as possible, the socialist Yugoslav leadership deliberately stimulated departure of population from the perceived backwardness of the traditional rural society which Yugoslavia largely was at the end of the Second World War (Allcock 2000; Halpern 1975; Rusinow 1971). This, in turn, created a feeling of antipathy towards the countryside and farming as an occupation and a way of life, and stimulated population's large-scale abandonment of rural areas. While many rural Yugoslavs could not make it to the urban parts of the country, those who did so were blamed for "peasantization of the city" or "ruralisation of the town" (Halpern 1975; Simić 1973), i.e. for bringing rural values and peasant lifestyle into an urban environment, forcing urbanites to adapt to these migrants' way of life, rather than the other way around.

Hence, arrival of a great number of IDPs from the countryside to the city, and their decision to remain in these urban centres after the war ended, has been interpreted as a continuation of the aforementioned urbanisation dynamics. As it was stressed in some studies on refugees' and IDPs' return in post-war Bosnia, the war has contributed to accelerate the already present phenomenon of migration to urban centres, and it was this urbanisation, and not ethnic insecurity, that became one of the strongest barriers to return process (Belloni 2007; Jansen 2007, 2011; Phuong 2000, 2004; Toal and Dahlman 2004). Many IDPs, especially younger generations, did not want to return to their homes in remote rural areas due to better standard of living and safety nets that urban centres offered. In the Bosnian urbanites' opinion, the consequence of such decision was that the city has once again become taken by peasants with different manners, appearance, behaviour, socializing habits and lifestyle, who threaten to irretrievably spoil the city's sophisticated identity and values.

2.1.6. IDPs, locals and minority returnees

To a certain extent, internally displaced persons and minority returnees have had a resembling war experience – they have both gone through similar predicament when it comes to forcible expulsion from their homes, property and other losses, and personal traumas. Nonetheless, the fact that they have been on the opposite war sides, coupled with clashing interests in the post-war period and widespread prejudice about each other, has inevitably led to the creation of divisions among these two groups.

IDPs have believed that their rights were ignored and their interests neglected due to the international community's preferential treatment of minority returnees, while returnees complained about being victims of diverse forms of discrimination in local communities that favoured their co-ethnic IDPs. General mistrust and widespread hostility were especially apparent in the period of the property law implementation (late 1990s and early 2000s), when IDPs were obliged to leave the occupied houses and cede them to the returnees, even though in many cases their own property issues had not yet been resolved (see Chapters 3 and 4). The international organisations' reports during this period emphasised that IDPs, when compared to local populations, were expressing a much higher level of ethnic intolerance towards the members of other ethnic groups. Embittered by their own war and displacement experiences, IDPs were often taking into their hands forceful occupation of property, eviction processes, law obstruction, and seeking 'justice' for their suffering through discrimination, hatred and psychological violence towards ethnic other (Amnesty International 2000; Human Rights Watch 2000; International Crisis Group 1997, 2002).

One feature which has frequently been attached to IDPs, and which is usually made relevant in relation to their rural background, is their distinguished nationalism. The nationalism of rural IDPs is commonly expressed in their propensity to support nationalist parties and radical political agendas, which furthermore affected their relationship with returnees of different ethnic origin. In the popular imaginary among Jašarević's (2007) respondents from Porebrice near Brčko, displaced persons of rural background were noted not only for their illiteracy, dialects, and dress, but also for their nationalism and radical religiosity which are cemented in their persistent voting support for nationalist political parties. According to Stefansson's (2007: 68) informants in Sarajevo, due to their alleged low education, IDPs of rural origin were seen as an

“easy prey for manipulation by the nationalist parties”, while their presupposed backwardness, aggressiveness and cultural ignorance, made them more inclined to take up arms against their neighbours of different ethnicity. In some instances, it was the ‘ethnic engineering’ campaigns of the municipality authorities that secured IDPs’ support to the nationalist parties (see Chapter 3). IDPs have formed homogenous voting blocks for the respective political entity to which they owed their gratitude and loyalty for various benefits they were given in return for their resettlement in ethnically majority areas (such as free plots of land, building material, tax exemption, etc.) (Grandits 2007; Lippman 2015). Toal and Dahlman (2011: 118) observed that in some municipalities where the most intensive ethnic engineering campaigns have taken place, IDPs have become “bulwarks of the new ethnocratic order”. For example, the IDPs who resettled in Doboj (Republika Srpska) have been the strongest supporters and the most numerous members of the nationalist Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in that town (around 70 per cent of the party’s local membership), helping it to achieve victories in the post-war electoral races (Toal and Dahlman 2011).

Explanation for the abovementioned cleavages could primarily be found in ethno-national differences between IDPs and minority returnees. Given the specific post-war Bosnian context dominated by ethnic animosity and seclusions, the presence of such cleavages is hardly surprising. However, when local population is introduced into this relationship, some other divisions take primacy over those based on different ethnic identity. Several studies have illustrated the cases where locals of one ethnic group find it more natural to come to an understanding and (re)establish friendly relations with returnees of another ethnic group, than with their compatriots who are newcomers from rural areas. Therefore, social and cultural divisions come before ethnic ones.

Eastmond (2006: 152) noted that her Serb informants in Banja Luka expressed joy when their pre-war Bosniak neighbours, whom they perceived as “civilized” as themselves, returned to their apartment, as in this way it was finally possible to “get rid” of rural Serbs who had been occupying Bosniak properties in their absence. Bosniak returnees in Stolac attached different moral values to the local Croats and those Croats who relocated themselves to this town from countryside, and who “do not know the local culture and codes of behaviour”, “do not fit in” and have been accused, unlike “decent” native Croats, of creating all sort of troubles to prevent Bosniak returns

(Kolind 2007: 134; 2008: 162). The World Bank study (Poggi et al. 2002) recorded that minority returnees in Zvornik complained about behaviour of IDPs, but they praised behaviour of locals. Not only that conflicts of interest between minority returnees and locals were less direct than with IDPs, but they also felt a strong bond with domicile population with whom they shared a distinctive pre-war local identity. Likewise, as Maček (2009) observed, being one of 'us' in Sarajevo during the war, did not necessarily signify a national category. A particular 'Sarajevanness', i.e. common values and shared moral qualities that created a specific bond between Sarajevans of all ethnicities, was one of the strongest collective identities that people identified with. Local Sarajevans wished for their old neighbours to return as they believed that newcomers in the city, although being of the same ethnicity as themselves, do not share the same moral beliefs and are therefore representing a threat to the unique Sarajevan pre-war spirit.

This chapter gave an insight into theoretical perspectives on social identity, explaining what social identity is, how it is being formed, maintained and transformed, and what purpose it serves. Furthermore, it gave an overview of the scholarship which deals with forcible displacement of population and effects their displacement experience has on their identities, i.e. on their perception and understanding of self and other. In the context of displaced persons' perception of the self, the chapter explored how sense of loss influences creation of a distinct refugee/IDP identity and how displaced people's memories and connections to the past help in maintaining different components of their identities through invoking a sense of continuity and producing a much-needed feeling of belonging. In the context of displaced persons' perception of self *and* others (or self *through* others), the chapter addressed the question of displaced people's relationship with their hosts, emphasizing stereotyping and counter-stereotyping processes which are frequently employed between these two groups. In its last part, this chapter addressed the question of how forcible displacement of population influenced identities of different groups and categories within Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. It introduced some of the social cleavages which have been produced or reinforced due to the war and mass population movement, but which have been based on criteria other than ethnic ones. The presence of new social cleavages in post-war Bosnia and

Herzegovina, as well as attention this issue have got in academia, is of relevance for the subsequent chapters of this study which will focus on exploring the relationship between the local and the displaced population in the Bosnian city of Bijeljina.

The following chapter looks into forcible displacement of population in Bosnia and Herzegovina more generally, focusing on international community's policies concerning return of refugees and IDPs to their places of origin, as well as impact of these policies on lives and identities of displaced groups of population.

3. War and Population Displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Limits of ‘Domicile Return’

3.1. Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA)

According to the 1991 census, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a home of 4.4 million people, 43.5 per cent of whom were Muslims (Bosniaks), 31.2 per cent Serbs, and 17.4 per cent Croats. Among the remaining groups, the most numerous were those who declared themselves as Yugoslavs (5.5 per cent). The three most practiced religions, corresponding to the three respective main ethnic groups, were Islam (42.7 per cent), Christian Orthodoxy (29.3 per cent), and Catholicism (13.5 per cent) (Population census 1991). As it can be seen from the census data, none of the three largest ethnic groups constituted the absolute majority. Moreover, the pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina was ethnically mixed in such a way that there were no clearly ethnically homogenous regions. Instead, Bosnia’s various ethnic groups were intermingled in their geographical distribution to such extent that, as it is often vividly described, the Bosnian ethnic picture resembled a ‘leopard-skin’ pattern.

The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia was characterized by waves of aggressive ethnic cleansing – a policy designed by one ethnic group with an aim to systematically and forcefully remove the civilian population of another ethnic group from certain geographical areas. Through forcible expulsion, an existing spatial order was replaced by another one, organized around ethnic divisions and seclusions. Implementation of such policy has resulted in massive demographic losses and population movement. Around 100,000 people lost their lives, 40 per cent of whom were civilians (Istraživačko-dokumentacioni Centar 2013). Half of the country’s total population has been forcibly displaced: 1.3 million people became refugees, dispersed throughout 25 host countries, while about one million remained in BiH as internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNHCR 2000). Countries of the region – Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and Croatia, hosted the largest number of BiH refugees (297,000 and 170,000,

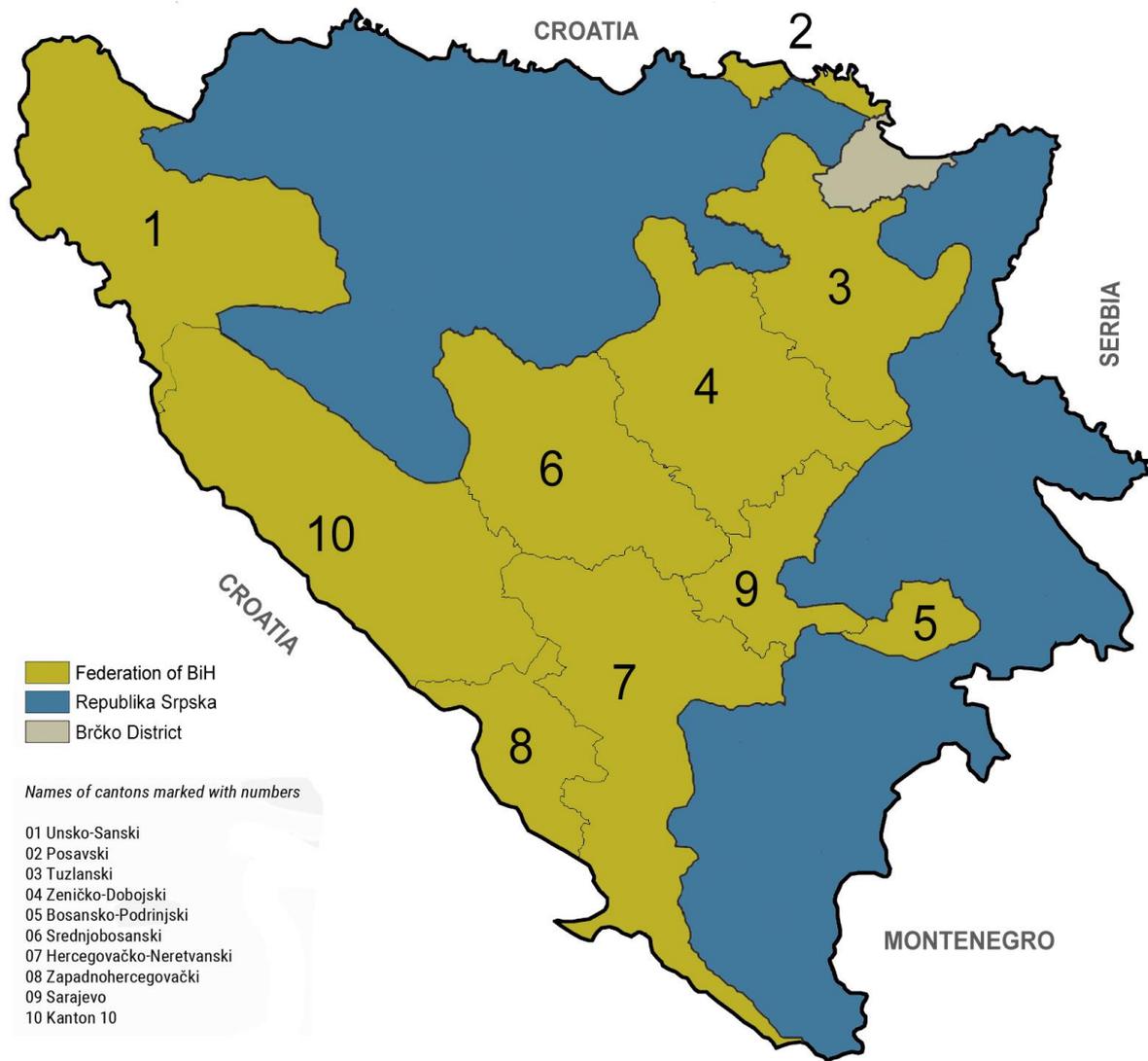
respectively). Outside the region, Germany provided for majority of BiH refugees (320,000), followed by Austria (86,500). These four countries accepted around 75 per cent of a total number of BiH refugees. Significant number of Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees was also accepted by Sweden (58,700), Denmark (17,000) and Norway (12,000) (BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees 2005).

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA)), which ended the war in November 1995⁷, defined a variety of questions, from the country's constitution and military aspects of the peace settlement, to refugee return, regulations on public corporations, and human rights. Furthermore, it mandated a wide range of international organizations to monitor, oversee, and implement different components of the agreement. Due to these organisations' extended authority and power, Bosnia and Herzegovina has often been perceived as a type of semi-protectorate (Gilbert and Mujanović 2015; Knaus and Martin 2003).

The DPA has been praised for stopping the devastating three-and-a-half year war and establishing the basis on which Bosnia and Herzegovina could strengthen peace and build its democratic institutions. However, it has also been criticized for dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines and establishing an ethnic principle in internal organisation and functioning of the country. In order to preserve autonomy of each of the three major ethnic groups and former warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina (namely – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats), the DPA formed one of the world's most complicated and decentralised systems of governance. Today's Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of the two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation, FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), as well as the autonomous Brčko district (established in 2000). Furthermore, the FBiH is divided into ten autonomous cantons, each with its own government (see Figure 3.1.). Unlike the pre-war Bosnia, the newly-established entities encompassed territories with a high level of ethnic homogeneity, which meant that the DPA *de facto* institutionalised the ethnic partition of the country which came out as a result of the dramatic three-and-a-half year war.

⁷ The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA)), was reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio (U.S.) on 21 November 1995. It was formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 by the presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The negotiations that preceded the signing of the DPA were led by Richard Holbrooke, who was the chief U.S. peace negotiator, and Secretary of State, Warren Christopher.

Figure 3.1: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Administrative structure as established in the DPA: Entities, cantons and Brčko District



Source: Author

In addition to two entities, one autonomous district and 10 cantons, Bosnia has 180 ministers at different levels and 700 elected state officials for a population of only 3.5 million people. The DPA established a complex power-sharing mechanisms between and among these different levels of government which have been controlled by political leaderships of the three main ethno-national groups (acknowledged by the DPA as ‘constituent people’). These ethno-national political elites have held different interpretations of the recent wartime past and divergent visions with regards to the future organization of the state, which has severely impeded decision-making process and future political, economic and social progress of the country. More than twenty

years after the end of the violent conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina is often described as a non-functional and expensive state, and is identified with political deadlock, economic stagnation and continuous ethnic bickering and strife (Belloni 2009; Bieber 2006; Gordy 2015). Bosnians and Herzegovinians, on their side, are met with an intensive feeling of “not moving well enough” (Jansen 2014) or even “being stuck” (Jansen et al. 2016) both in place and time, as struggles for their livelihoods, feelings of unpredictability in political, economic and social sense, as well as both personal and collective stagnation, seem to be a permanent state in which they find themselves.

2.1.7. Annex 7 of the DPA

The international community has recognized the refugees’ and IDPs’ return as essential to the reconstruction and reconciliation process in conflict-ridden societies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where displacement of population was seen as the particular aim of the war, this policy was burdened by one more important task, and that is the reversal of the ethnic cleansing and the re-establishment of multi-ethnicity across the country. According to the dominant discourse of return at the time, a ‘natural order’ or ‘normalcy’ that is presumed to have existed prior to displacement, would be restored in this way. Additionally, return was perceived as a political “righting of wrongs” in the wars that followed the breakup of the Yugoslav federation (Black 2001: 183). For this reason, Annex 7 of the DPA ensured the right of all Bosnian refugees and IDPs to freely return not only to their country of origin, but to their very pre-war *homes*, establishing in this way a unique concept in international law, known as ‘domicile return’:

All refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin. They shall have the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of hostilities since 1991 and to be compensated for any property that cannot be restored to them. The early return of refugees and displaced persons is an important objective of the settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The parties confirm that they will accept the return of such persons who have left their territory, including those who have been accorded temporary protection by third countries.

(DPA, Annex 7, Article I (1))

Article I stipulated that all parties shall ensure that refugees and displaced persons are permitted to return in safety, without risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination, particularly on account of their ethnic origin, religious belief, or political opinion. The parties needed to take all necessary steps to prevent those activities within their territories which would hinder or impede the safe and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. In other words, they needed to create a safe atmosphere for the return, and to ensure a free society rather than an exclusionist nationalist state. To show their commitment, all parties needed to take these confidence building measures: the repeal of domestic legislation and administrative practices with discriminatory intent or effect; the prevention and prompt suppression of any written or verbal incitement, through media or otherwise, of ethnic or religious hostility or hatred; the dissemination, through the media, of warnings against, and the prompt suppression of, acts of retribution by military, paramilitary, and police services, and by other public officials or private individuals; the protection of ethnic and/or minority populations wherever they are found and the provision of immediate access to these populations by international humanitarian organizations and monitors; the prosecution, dismissal or transfer, as appropriate, of persons in military, paramilitary, and police forces, and other public servants, responsible for serious violations of the basic rights of persons belonging to ethnic or minority groups (Article I (2), (3)). Importantly, Article I also stipulated that choice of destination shall be up to the individual or family, and the principle of the unity of the family shall be preserved. Thus, the parties shall not interfere with the returnees' choice of destination, nor shall they compel them to remain in or move to situations of serious danger or insecurity, or to areas lacking in the basic infrastructure necessary to resume a normal life (Article I (4)). Therefore, Annex 7 acknowledged relocation as a possible solution for the displacement problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this question was highly controversial, as relocation to the territory controlled by the majority group was seen as a contribution to ethnic segregation produced by the war (see below).

Furthermore, Annex 7 created the nine-member Commission for Displaced Persons and Refugees. Operating under the name Commission for Real Property Claims of Displaced Persons and Refugees (CRPC), the Commission was mandated with the task to determine the rights of persons to real property from which they have been

displaced, and help them reclaim their homes. The Commission operated as to ensure that impartial, legally binding decisions would be made to guarantee the rights of all those who had lost their property to be able to return or to gain compensation (Articles VII - XVI). This was an important provision because refugees and IDPs were given more incentive to return knowing that they will get into repossession of their land, houses, and other property. Article III of the Annex 7 obliged the local authorities (entity and local governments) to work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other relevant international, domestic and nongovernmental organizations in implementation of a repatriation plan (Article III (2)). However, the Annex 7 of the DPA did not predict any sanctions for non-compliance, but depended on good faith of all parties involved.

3.2. 'Domicile return' policy and its shortcomings

Displacement of population which occurred due to the Bosnian war has attracted great scholarly attention, as it was considered to be the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The interest has primarily concentrated on the question of what has been the impact of international policymaking regarding the 'domicile return' concept, and what have been the limits of such defined return policy. In relation to this question, a significant scholarly concern has surrounded the issue of ethnic cleansing reversal which was supposed to be implemented through so-called 'minority return', i.e. the return of IDPs to the areas controlled by an ethnic group other than their own, where they would be in minority.

2.1.1. Ethnic cleansing reversal

The obvious contradiction of the DPA – practical legalisation of the ethnically homogenous regions on one side, and insisting on re-establishing the country's ethnic heterogeneity on the other, has been the subject of wide criticism. It was underlined

that the collective rights of groups to exclusive self-government, and rights of the individuals to return to the places from which they were expelled, have often been incompatible in the Bosnian context (Belloni 2007).

In the early years following the signing of the DPA, there were more than a hundred international organisations operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina, majority of which were involved in the return process (Phuong 2004). As Gilbert (2016) argues, the international humanitarian actors faced dilemmas which directly challenged their neutrality, impartiality, and independence, because it was difficult to completely avoid the role of politics and ethnicity, whereby Bosnia and Herzegovina was home to multiple and overlapping ideas about who and why deserved humanitarian aid and other forms of post-conflict assistance. Having post-war Bosnian party politics structured around ethnic differences, Bosnians and Herzegovinians learned to claim resources or other rights almost exclusively as ethnic subjects, or as victims of wartime suffering at the hands of ethnic other (ibid. 2016). As a result of these and similar obstacles, the international administrative structure that supervised the implementation of the Annex 7 and monitored the return process was struggling for years to build its political, legal and administrative capacity, mainly because it underestimated the level and intensity of obstructions to return by the ethno-nationalist local leaderships (Toal and O’Loughlin 2009). Especially in the immediate aftermath of the war (1996-1999), the nationalist political elites were using various means to impede the return process, starting from the adoption of unfavourable property laws, bureaucratic obstructionism, to the physical prevention of returns through intimidation and violence. In addition, they were leading the intensive campaigns aiming at persuading their own IDPs to permanently settle in the places of refuge, i.e. the areas where their ethnic group constitutes the majority. Such politically motivated relocation of population –the ethnic engineering– served the purpose to consolidate exclusionist territorial gains that were made during the war. Given their respective war aims and ethnic agendas, this campaign was particularly strong among the Serb and the Croat elites, for whom an “ideology of remaining” became the main political principle in the post-war period, in contrast to the “ideology of return”, advocated by the Bosniak leadership (Stefansson 2006: 128).⁸ Ethnic engineering was

⁸ The Serb and the Croat population in Bosnia and Herzegovina see themselves as a part of a wider Serbian/Croatian national, cultural and religious space. They consider the neighbouring countries (Serbia

being implemented through allocation of the abandoned housing to the co-ethnic IDPs, allocation of the land (usually the socially owned properties⁹), building material or funds for construction sites, adoption and implementation of favourable legislation, and it was carried out at the local, usually municipality level (Amnesty International 2000; Heimerl 2005; International Crisis Group 1999, 2002; Sivac-Bryant 2016; Toal and Dahlman 2004, 2006, 2011). As Dahlman and Toal (2005) argue, the return process in post-war Bosnia could be characterized as a geopolitical power struggle between the international community and returnees on one side, and ethno-nationalist forces on the other, who seized power during the war and sought to institutionalize local regimes of ethnic supremacy.

Also, in this initial post-war period, a considerable number of refugee returns was a consequence of the repatriation of those persons who were granted only temporary protection in Western Europe and elsewhere. In many cases, although such repatriations were voluntary acts, the refugees were given no choice at all, as the host countries looked to reduce welfare costs of supporting a significant refugee population as promptly as possible (Belloni 2007; Black and Gent 2006; Franz 2010). Fearing for their security and wellbeing, and/or being practically prevented from re-occupying the pre-war dwellings due to their physical destruction, these refugees did not necessarily return to their very homes. Instead, they opted for repatriation into internal displacement, finding temporary solution for the housing issue at the territory controlled by their own ethnic group. According to some UNHCR estimates in 1998, about 70 per cent of the repatriations which took place from abroad resulted in

and Croatia, respectively) as their national 'homelands', which keeps the Serb and the Croat identification with the post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina very weak. Also, due to the Bosniak (Muslim) demographic superiority, the Serbs and the Croats fear that they would be politically and culturally marginalised in a more centralised Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hence, given their respective ethno-national discourse, they perceive their more-or-less ethnically homogenous territories (RS, in the case of Serbs, or particular cantons within FBiH in the case of Croats) as a necessary bulwark against presumably aggressive national and religious aspirations of the Bosniaks. On the other side, the Bosniaks do not have a physical connection with a neighbouring 'mother' country and therefore consider the whole territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina as their 'homeland'. Assigning themselves a role of a main protector of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian integrity and unity, the Bosniak elites supported the return of co-ethnic refugees and IDPs to their pre-war homes way more energetically than the respective elites of the other two ethnic groups, especially to the territories which Bosniaks 'lost' during the war. The study of Stefanovic and Loizides (2017) confirmed that Bosniak returnees have been more likely to return as a community, as their respective ethno-national authorities offered support and resources for an organized return, while Serb and Croat ethno-nationalist authorities were more oriented towards discouraging their co-ethnics from returning.

⁹ A sort of collective ownership characteristic for the Socialist Yugoslav regime; a property belonging to entities entrusted with its administration as well as to society as a whole; a status in between ownership and tenancy.

relocation (Wubs 1998). As a consequence, the early repatriation waves furthermore reinforced ethno-territorial divisions in the country, making the execution of the domicile return policy even more complicated and challenging (Amnesty International 2000; Belloni 2007; Čapo 2015; Jansen 2011; Stefansson 2004; Toal and Dahlman 2004; Valenta and Strabac 2011; Walsh, Black and Koser 1999).

The initial setbacks in Annex 7 implementation prompted the international actors to establish a comprehensive ‘property law implementation process’ (PLIP) in 1999¹⁰, which marked a policy shift towards much more direct international intervention in the return process. The PLIP was designed to enable all refugees and IDPs to exercise their rights under Annex 7 by filing claims for their pre-war property (including the socially owned apartments) and freely returning to their dwellings once this process was completed. Refugees and IDPs could no longer assume that their pre-1992 properties were inevitably lost, while those occupying somebody else’s houses became aware that such state of affairs could not be prolonged indefinitely. Importantly, as solving the problem of illegal occupation of property was at the heart of the return process, successful implementation of property restitution was considered to be the key element in securing minority returns, reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing, and re-establishing multi-ethnicity across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previously, the Office of High Representative (OHR)¹¹, whose task was to oversee the implementation of civilian aspects of the DPA, developed a package of uniformed property laws which abolished arbitrary wartime legislation adopted by ethno-nationalist elites. In this way, together with the property restitution programme, the “moral impulse” to reverse ethnic cleansing that had existed up to that point, was translated into a bureaucratic agenda, grounded in the rule of law (Toal and Dahlman 2004: 443; also Heimerl 2005). The OHR also acquired the power to remove local officials from office if they delayed or

¹⁰ The Property Law Implementation Plan (PLIP) was developed from collaborative relationships between The Office of the High Representative (OHR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) and Commission for Real Property Claims (CRPC), as some of the leading organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in property and return issues. For more information about PLIP, see, for example: Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The Property Law Implementation Plan (PLIP), Inter-agency framework document, October 2000, av. at: <http://unhcr.ba/images/stories/Lib/PLIP/PLIPFRAM.pdf>

¹¹ The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an ad hoc international institution created under the provisions of the DPA (Annex 10), whose main role has been to oversee implementation of civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The OHR represents the countries involved in the implementation of the DPA through the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). Official website: <http://www.ohr.int/?lang=en>

obstructed implementation of the DPA¹², while organisations involved in the return process (such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Mission in BiH), through creation of the Reconstruction and Return Task Force (RRTF)¹³, established better coordination among themselves in planning and implementing the ground-level support to the returnees.

The implementation of property laws, coupled with significant financial assistance provided for reconstruction of the housing fund for the needs of return, was particularly stimulating for minority returns. Given the fact that minority return was recognized as the key to restoration of the socio-demographic structure of the BiH society, this process was followed by continuous political obstructions of the local ethno-nationalist elites who did not wish to return to the pre-war state of affairs. Minority returnees were often subjects of violence and intimidation, as well as victims of diverse forms of discrimination in a political environment still driven by the rampant nationalism of the majority group (Amnesty International 1998, 2000; Belloni 2005; European Stability Initiative 2007; Heimerl 2005; International Crisis Group 1997, 1997a, 1999, 2002; Jansen 2007, 2011; Pickering 2003, 2007; Sivac-Bryant 2016; Stefansson 2006; Dahlman and Toal 2005, Wubs 1998). Nonetheless, due to strong international pressure, minority returns reached their peak in the period from 2000 to 2002. In 2004, the official figures showed that one million refugees and internally displaced persons had returned to their homes (UNHCR 2004). In 2010, that number reached 1,048.498, almost half of which were minority returns, while in 2016 the number of returns slightly increased to around 1,060.000. Furthermore, 42 per cent counted as refugee returns, while 58 per cent concerned return of the internally displaced persons (BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees 2011; 2017) (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Also, property return is considered to be a great achievement of the international community. By December 2003, close to 93 per cent of all real property

¹² These are the so-called 'Bonn powers' granted by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). They also allowed for the OHR to impose legislative measures when political representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina could not reach a compromise among themselves.

¹³ Reconstruction and Return Task Force (RRTF) was set up under the OHR in 1997, bringing together all agencies working on return-related issues. In response to the many obstacles to refugee return encountered during the initial post-war period, its aim was to coordinate the international community's efforts on refugee return, alongside applying political pressure on BiH authorities in order to prevent or combat their obstructionist activities regarding the return process (see e.g. European Stability Initiative 1999; International Crisis Group 1999).

restitution claims were processed. The essential confirmation for the completion of the property laws implementation was given to the most of municipalities in BiH during 2004 when more than 99 per cent of the property cases were registered as closed (BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees 2005).

Table 3.1: *Return of refugees and IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2010)*

Return of refugees and IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-2010)							
Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
IDPs	164,741	58,295	29,570	43,385	59,347	80,172	70,775
Refugees	88,039	120,280	110,000	31,650	18,607	18,693	37,134
Total	252,780	178,575	139,570	75,035	77,954	98,865	107,909
Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009/10
IDPs	40,303	17,948	5,164	4,184	4,516	7,359	13,550
Refugees	14,012	2,442	1,273	1,419	3,062	525	2,053
Total	54,315	20,390	6,437	5,603	7,578	7,884	15,603

Source: BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, *Informacija o povratku izbjeglica i raseljenih osoba u BiH u za period 1995-2010. godine, Sarajevo 2011*

Table 3.2: *Minority Returns in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Entity level (1996-2005)*

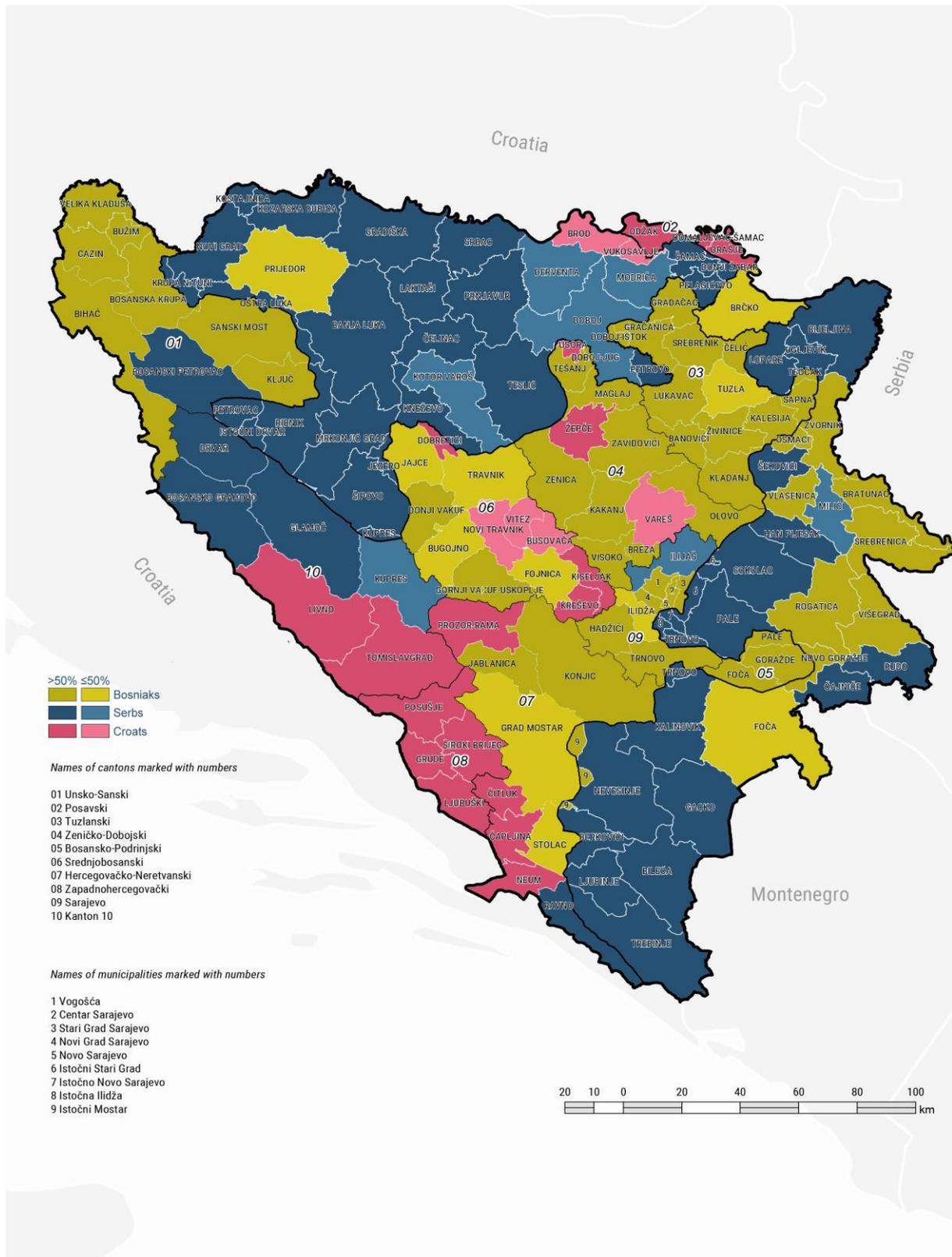
Minority Returns in Bosnia and Herzegovina Entity level (1996-2005)				
Year	Federation BiH (FBiH)	Republika Srpska (RS)	Brčko District (BD)	Total BiH
1996-1997	44,398	1,125		45,523
1998	32,605	8,586		41,191
1999	27,987	13,020		41,007
2000	34,377	27,558	5,510	67,445
2001	46,848	40,253	4,960	92,061
2002	51,814	41,345	8,952	102,111
2003	25,130	18,051	1,687	44,868
2004	5,881	8,045	273	14,199
2005	2,694	2,887		5,581
Total	271,734	160,870	21,382	453,986

Source: BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, *Comparative Analysis on Access to Rights of Refugees and Displaced Persons, Sarajevo, December 2005*

In reality, however, the actual return to place of origin has been considerably less than envisaged. According to some UNHCR estimates in 1998, about 70 per cent of the repatriations which took place from abroad resulted in relocation, and not return to their very pre-war homes (Wubs 1998). Around three-fifths of over one million Bosnians who sought protection abroad have not repatriated at all (Jansen 2011). Some reports estimate that there are around 750,000 Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees who still live abroad (Regional Housing Programme 2017). According to the latest data, there is more than 98,000 people who still remain internally displaced within the country – 40.6 per cent in FBiH, 58.8 per cent in RS, and 0.5 per cent in Brčko District (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2015; BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees 2017; UNHCR 2016). Also, many people did not claim their property, while there was a considerable number of those who used this right, but were not actually willing to stay: they chose to sell, exchange or rent their repossessed properties instead. After obtaining dual citizenships, some of them continue to live abroad where they can secure sustainable livelihoods, while their properties in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being used only temporary, during seasonal visits (Black, Eastmond and Gent 2006; Eastmond 2006; Gilbert 2016; Loizides, Stefanovic and Elston-Alphas 2017; Stefansson 2006; Toal and Dahlman 2011; Toal and O’Loughlin 2009).

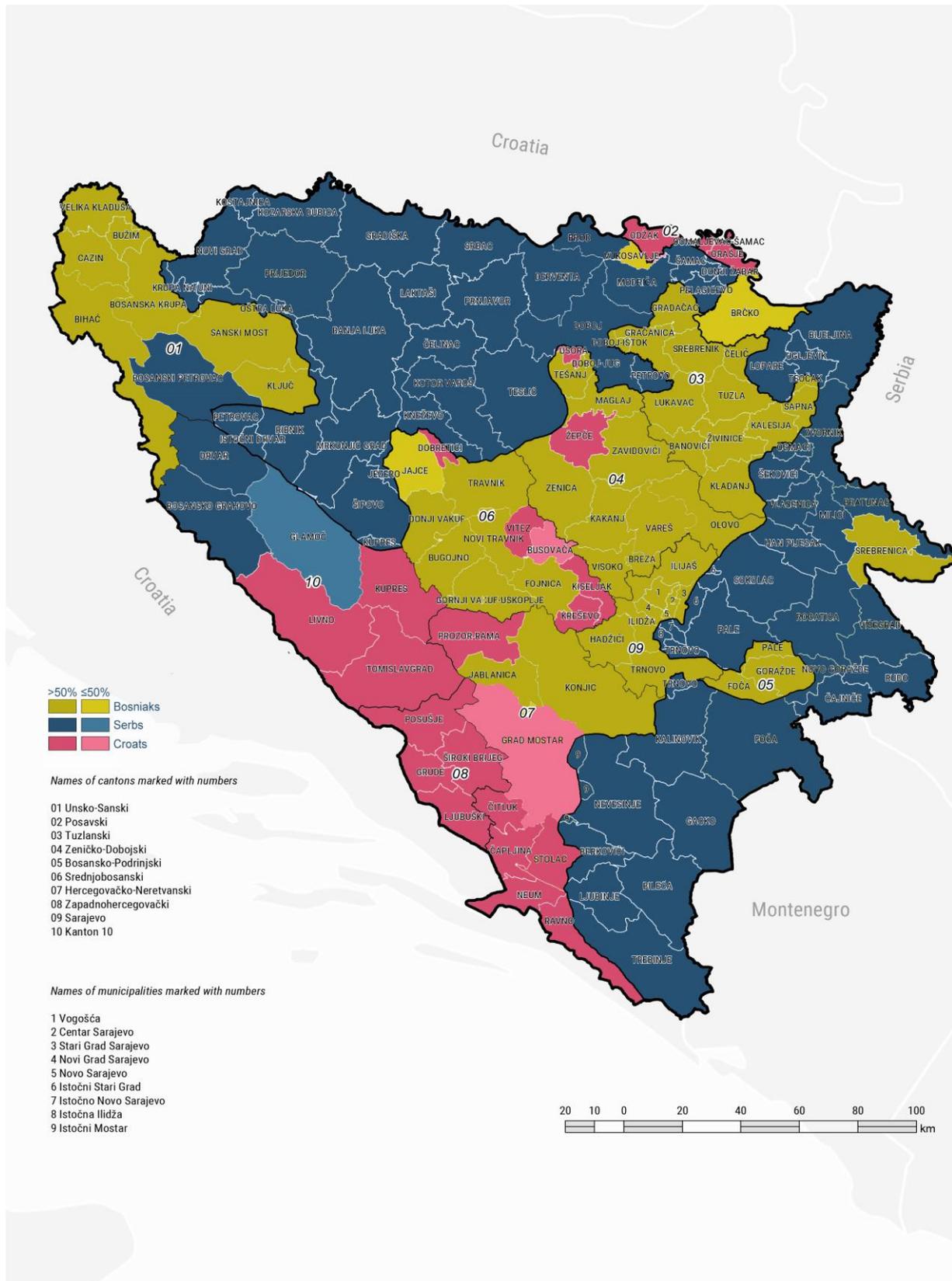
Therefore, despite the enormous political capital and funds invested in the efforts to recreate local multi-ethnicity, the return policy adopted by the international community has only had a limited success. If we speak in terms of Bosnia’s demographic character, the successfully implemented return of pre-war properties did not manage to secure the return of the pre-1992 situation. In other words, ethnic cleansing during the war, and ethnic engineering in its aftermath, have largely disturbed the ethnically heterogeneous structure of the country (see Figures 3.2. and 3.3.), so that “post-war Bosnia looks far more divided and polarised than the very mixed pre-war ethnic map” (Sivac-Bryant 2016: 169). Bosnia’s 2013 population census, which was the first official population count since 1991, revealed that the ethnic homogenisation has become an undeniable fact on the ground, as the two entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina have a clear ethnic structure. More concretely, 91.39 per cent of all Bosnian Croats and 88.29 percent of all Bosniaks are now living in the FBiH, while 92.14 per cent of all Bosnian Serbs are having their residence in the RS (Population census 2013) (see Table 3.3).

Figure 3.2: Ethnic composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina according to 1991 population census: Municipality level (with border lines between entities and Brčko District as established in the DPA in 1995)



Source: Author; Data source: Državni Zavod za statistiku Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Nacionalni sastav stanovništva: rezultati po opštinama i naseljenim mjestima 1991., Statistički Bilten 234, December 1993

Figure 3.3: Ethnic composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina according to 2013 population census: Municipality level



Source: Author; Data source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Census of population, households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013, Sarajevo 2016

Table 3.3: Ethnic composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Entity level (2013)

	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)		Republika Srpska (RS)		Brčko District (BD)	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
Bosniaks	1,562,372	70.40	171,839	13.99	35,381	42.36
Serbs	56,550	2.55	1,001,299	81.51	28,884	34.58
Croats	497,883	22.44	29,645	2.41	17,252	20.66
Rest	102,415	4.61	25,640	2.09	1,999	2.39
Total	2,219,220	100	1,228,423	100	83,516	100
Total (BiH)	3,531,159					

Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Census of population, households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013, Book 2, Brochure 2.1.

2.1.2. 'Qualitative' aspect of the return process

Putting the number of actual returns aside, one more objection to the 'domicile return' policy implementation concerns 'qualitative' aspect of the return process. It has been stressed that international focus on return (especially minority return) in Bosnia and Herzegovina became a greatly politicized question that led to a massive international interference. Consequently, the act of return was perceived less as a matter of an individual's choice, and more a matter of international policymaking that was imposed at times. "Those who needed saving", as Brković (2014: 10) stresses, "often [did] not have a choice but to endure their predicament and [were] often required to transform their ideas of what a normal unravelling of lives entails". Such defined policies very often underestimated or completely neglected the power of geopolitical, economic, and social factors on return sustainability. In other words, although a lot of financial assistance was used for property restitution, reconstruction and safety, less attention was given to creating the socio-economic conditions for effective long-term enjoyment of people's right to return (Black 2001; Black and Gent 2006; Chandler 1999; Jansen 2006, 2007; Stefansson 2006). Many minority returnees belonged to the category of

elderly and retired people who lived in isolated rural enclaves. Facing little employment opportunities, and being in a greater need for social service in a system that had just gone through profound deterioration due to the devastating war, they have become one of the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups in Bosnia, being associated with inward-looking, enclave mentality, and social and cultural stagnation (Dahlman and Toal 2005; Heimerl 2005; Petrović 2007; Sivac-Bryant 2016). The fact that post-war reconstruction went along the process of post-socialist transformation of Bosnian and Herzegovinian economy and society (introduction of democracy and market capitalism), has only aggravated the socio-economic conditions for refugees and IDPs. With attention being shifted from saving 'bare' lives to fostering post-conflict, peace-building, developmental reconstruction (Brković 2014, 2014a), Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees and IDPs were forced to make decisions, including those on return, by taking into account both the country's post-war reconstruction, and political-economic transformation (Gilbert 2016; Jansen 2006).

Besides this, as some authors argue (i.e. Stefansson 2010), the idea supported by the international community that ethnic re-mixing alone is sufficient for re-building trust and fostering reconciliation among the former warring parties, has also proved to be over-optimistic in the Bosnian context. While for many Bosnian refugees and IDPs the return has been result of their strong emotional attachment to the particular geographical place, many Stefansson's informants explained their act of return primarily in terms of defiance and resistance towards local elites of the majority ethnic group. Restoring their lives in pre-war places of residence was perceived as political and moral imperative and was motivated by desire for justice and rightening the wrongs of the past, rather than by the wish for ethnic reconciliation (Stefansson 2004; 2010). Post-war return and reconstruction represent merely the beginning of what is required to overcome deep divisions and ethnic antagonism within the Bosnian society that remain one of the most striking legacies of the 1992-1995 war (Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2006).

Furthermore, there might have been different understandings of the meaning of 'home' between policymakers involved in the return process in Bosnia, and the returnees themselves (Black 2002; Black and Gent 2006, Black and Koser 1999; Čapo 2015; Jansen 2006, 2007; Jansen and Löfving 2009; Markowitz and Stefansson 2004; Stefansson 2004, 2006). As mentioned earlier, Annex 7 of the DPA established the

concept of domicile return, allowing refugees and IDPs to return to their very pre-war dwellings. Significant efforts and funds were invested in minority returns, based not only on the assumption that this would lead to the reversal of the ethnic cleansing, but also that people are “collectively rooted in a particular place through culture” (Jansen 2006: 180) and are therefore indisputably willing to return. Yet, as Black (2002) points out, it is tempting to argue that the identification of individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina lays strongly with certain place. For most Bosnians and Herzegovinians, equal reclaim of their houses and apartments as mere physical constructions have not simultaneously meant retaking their ‘homes’ in a broader sense of this concept (Stefansson 2004, 2006; Žiła 2015). Homelands are not so much territorial or topographic entities as they are moral destinations (Malkki 1992), and ‘home’ represents much more than a physical place. What matters, in fact, are qualities attached to it, such as security, familiarity, economic prosperity or freedom. As nationalist violence –such as the one experienced during the Bosnian conflict– can very often purposefully lead towards irreversible changes in people’s notion of belonging in both territorial and social terms, many refugees and IDPs, although experiencing nostalgia for their former homes, became well-aware that the ‘homes’ left behind are now different places, with largely transformed political and socio-economic fabric (Jansen and Löfving 2009). These transformations have often been held responsible for a sudden absence of ‘normalcy’ or ‘normal life’ which many refugees and IDPs in post-war Bosnia felt to be inevitably lost both in place and time. With the absence of such defined normalcy, Bosnian refugees and IDPs might have been able to restore their pre-war houses, but they have lost the possibility to restore something that matters even more, and that is their very pre-war *lives* (Jansen 2006, 2007).

In the changing political and socio-economic Bosnian context, a variety of factors have influenced one’s perception of ‘home’ and desire to return: nationality, gender, age, class, particular war experiences and traumas, urban-rural origin, political pressure, perceptions of the ‘ethnic other’, the time spent in the place of refuge and the possibility of renewing pre-war social networks being only some of them (Jansen 2006, 2007; Loizides, Stefanovic and Elston-Alphas 2017; Metivier, Stefanovic and Loizides 2017; Poggi et al. 2002; Stefanovic and Loizides 2017; Žiła 2015). Thus, while some Bosnians and Herzegovinians perceived return to their pre-war residence as the only desirable option, many of them felt more at ‘home’ in the country of asylum or particular place of

exile within Bosnia. In many instances, it was the intensive ethnic engineering campaigns of nationalist elites that persuaded their own displaced persons to settle permanently in the areas where their co-ethnics constitute the majority. In the nationalist discourses, as Jansen (2006) noted, being 'at home' meant living among members of one's own nation, and on one's own territory.

However, with the international community's accent on minority return and ethnic cleansing reversal, the 'relocation' of refugees and IDPs (i.e. their permanent settlement in ethnically majority areas) has been downplayed and seen as "some sort of taboo" (Phuong 2000: 175). In this view, backing such policy would have actually meant supporting ethnic un-mixing of population and giving legitimacy to the ethno-nationalist war agendas. This position taken by the international community went against the wish of many IDPs who simply did not want to return for the reasons other than their loyalty towards respective ethno-nationalist leaderships, or their deep considerations about national, ethnic or religious identity. Especially if they were displaced for a long period of time and had access to economic and social opportunities that would have likely be lacking in their places of origin, their concerns referred to the security threats, aggravating socio-economic conditions, missing social networks, or difficult access to healthcare and desired educational system upon return. In some instances and for some groups of displaced people, forcible displacement is not only about loss of place, disempowerment and longing for their pre-war homes, but represents the process of place making, of regaining control over their lives, and establishing oneself in new life circumstances (Korac 2009). As Stefansson (2006: 129) documented in the case of Serb IDPs in Banja Luka, "the remarkable absence of nostalgia towards home" was caused by the feeling that the 'normalcy' in these IDPs' places of origin could not be recreated, and that, under such circumstances, starting a new life surrounded by their fellow nationals represented the only viable solution. This discrepancy between international policymaking and displaced people's wishes regarding the return process shows that, despite personal desire to help others, the international humanitarian actors and policymakers could not treat all lives as equal, as they were guided by procedural elements that unavoidably involved the intertwined influence of nationality, geopolitics and compassion on decision-making process (see e.g. Brković 2014).

The issue of different understanding of the meaning of 'home' between policymakers involved in the return process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and refugees and IDPs themselves, is of special relevance for the subjects of this study – internally displaced persons in Bijeljina, who wished to resettle, instead to return. The reasons for their unwillingness to return to their pre-war houses and their perception of the concept of 'home' will be addressed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

This chapter addressed the question of the forcible displacement of population which came out as a result of the 1992-1995 armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It focused on the international policymaking with regards to the return process, and presented the main arguments which have meanwhile emerged in the literature concerning the limits of such defined policies. The question of how certain limitations in these policies, together with the policies adopted by the state and entity authorities, affected the lives of the internally displaced persons, has also been tackled in this chapter.

While this chapter talked about refugees and internally displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina more broadly, the following chapter will focus on a specific group of internally displaced persons of Serb ethnicity which were displaced to a majority-Serb Bosnian town of Bijeljina, and decided to permanently settle in this particular area. The following chapter will offer a background information on the number and origins of Bijeljina's IDPs and presented some major obstacles in their early integration process, including local government's response to these obstacles.

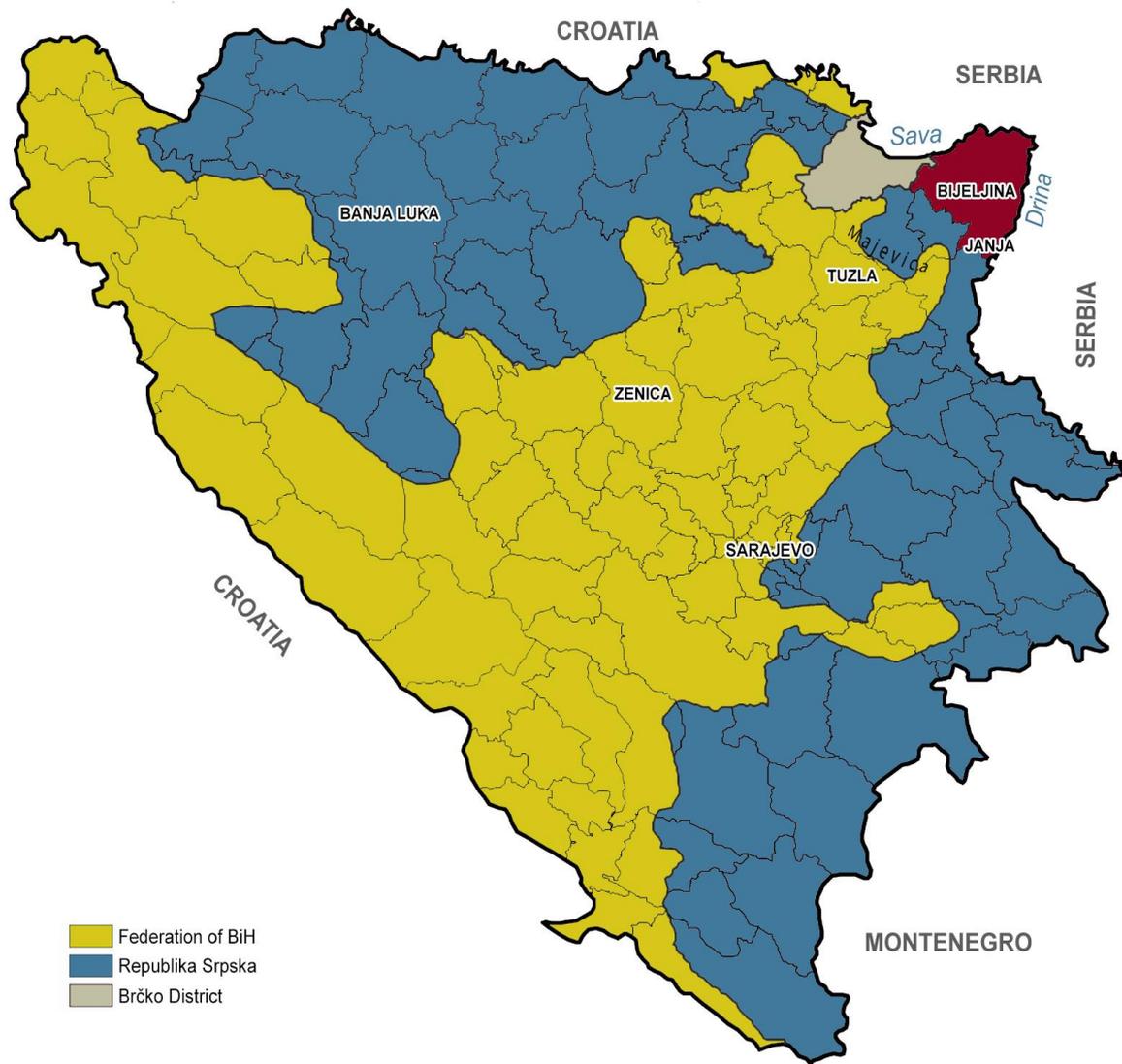
4. War in Bijeljina and Population Dynamics

4.1. Bijeljina – an overview

With 107,715 inhabitants, Bijeljina is the administrative centre of the north-eastern Bosnian region of Semberija, the second-largest city in the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (after the RS capital, Banja Luka), and the fifth largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina (after Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla and Zenica) (Population census 2013). It is situated on the outermost rim of the fertile Pannonia Plain, facing the Sava River as the natural border with Serbia and Croatia to the north, the Drina River as the natural border with Serbia to the east, and the Majevica mountain range to the south and south-west, which separates Semberija from the Tuzla Canton (FBiH) (see Figure 4.1.).

Given Bijeljina's proximity to the Serbian border (only six kilometres), and well-developed road infrastructure which connects it to the neighbouring Serbian towns, Bijeljina's population has been economically and culturally oriented towards major Serbian cities of Belgrade and Novi Sad, more than towards nearby regional centre Tuzla, or Bosnian capital Sarajevo. This especially stands true for Bijeljina's Serbs, who have been sharing the same ethnic, cultural and religious values with their compatriots east of the Drina River. During the 1992-1995 war and in the post-war decades, when ethno-nationalism occupied all spheres of social life, connections with Serbia were additionally strengthened. Most of today's population of Bijeljina, 85.21 per cent of whom are ethnic Serbs, are choosing Belgrade or Novi Sad while looking for employment, educational opportunities, or medical treatment.

Figure 4.1: Location of the municipality of Bijeljina within Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska



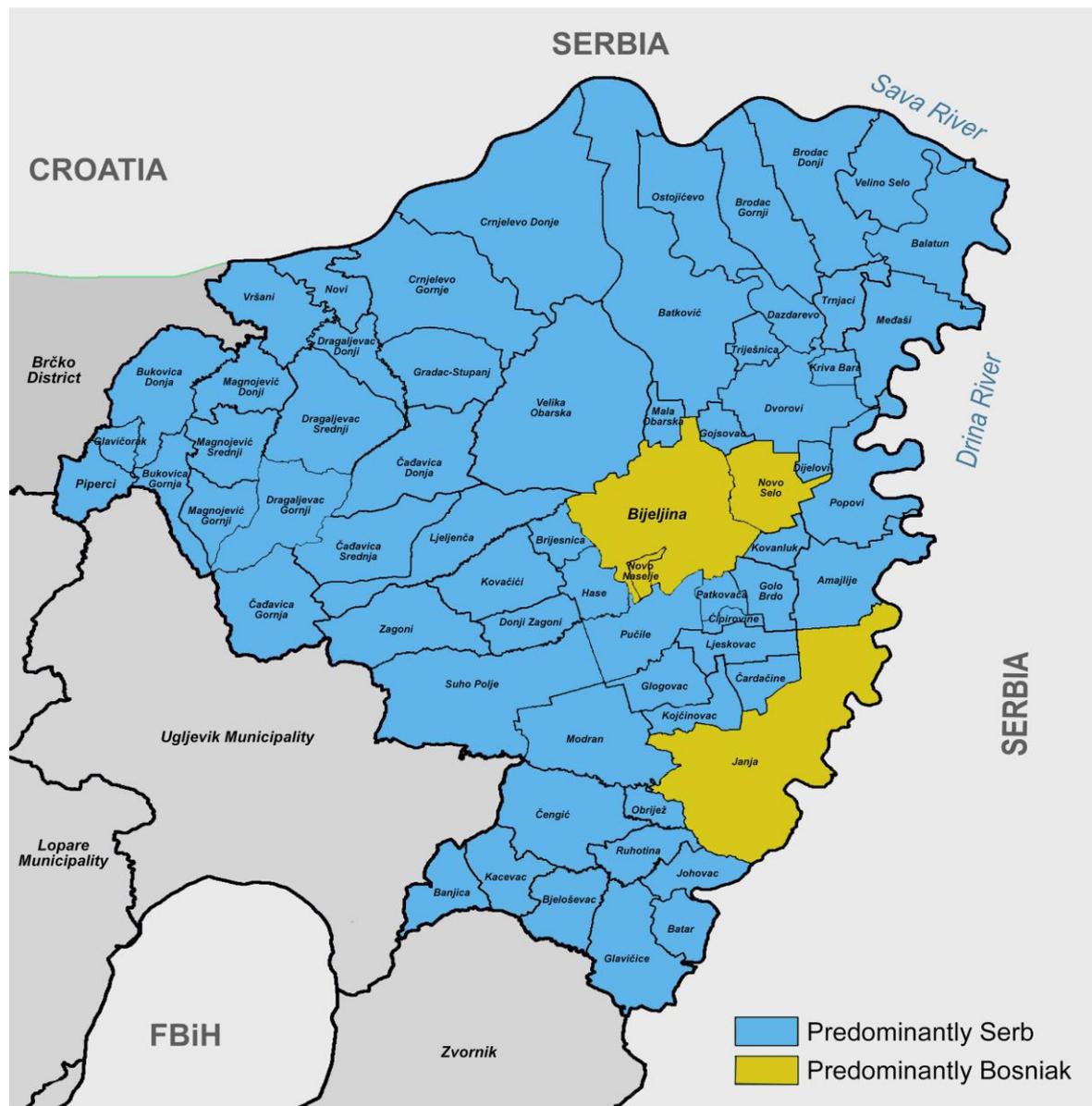
Source: Author

Due to suitable weather conditions and flat terrain with more than 50,000 hectares of arable land, agriculture has been the most developed economic sector in Semberija. The focus of agricultural production has been on wheat and corn which constitute 80 per cent of the overall agricultural production, as well as on fruits and vegetables (mostly cabbage, pepper, tomatoes and watermelon) (City of Bijeljina, official website). Bijeljina's cabbage was a highly-valued produce in the former Yugoslavia. Although this fact has been a source of pride for most of Semberija's agriculturalists, the colloquial name *kupusari* [cabbage people], which is attributed to the population of Semberija, is usually carrying a derogatory connotation (see Chapter 7). Semberija's fertile plain has

been providing food supplies for the region even under the worst of circumstances, such as during the armed conflict in the early 1990s. Combined with smuggling activities which flourished in the wartime due to the region's immediate proximity to the national borders, Bijeljina has enjoyed a relative prosperity compared to other BiH towns of similar size. However, Semberijans are pleased with the fact that the region they live in has not only been satisfying the needs of the local population, but has been considered the breadbasket of the entire Republika Srpska, or even of Bosnia as a whole.

When the war erupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the municipality of Bijeljina had 96,988 inhabitants, 59.17 per cent of whom were Serbs (57,389), 31.17 per cent Muslims (Bosniaks – 30,229), around five per cent Yugoslavs (4,426), and the rest were of other ethnicities. Croats constituted only 0.51 per cent of the total municipality population. The city proper had an ethnically mixed population of 36,414 people, the majority of whom were Bosniaks (52.24 per cent), followed by Serbs (28.69 per cent) and Yugoslavs (9.47 per cent). With the exception of the village of Janja with 94.38 per cent of Bosniak population, as well as several other Bosniak-dominated hamlets, the rural areas surrounding Bijeljina were predominantly, and in some cases almost exclusively, inhabited by the Serbs (Population census 1991) (see Figure 4.2.). More concretely, municipality of Bijeljina consisted of 60 settlements [*naseljeno mjesto*; a sub-municipal unit], 56 of which were predominantly inhabited by Serbs, while four were predominantly inhabited by Bosniaks (majority of 50 per cent and more). Serbs constituted an overwhelming majority (92 per cent and more) in 52, and Bosniaks in one of these settlements. Furthermore, there were 32 settlements which could be considered ethnically pure (majority of 99 per cent and more), and they were all inhabited by Serbs (Pašalić 2004). Bosniak dominance in the urban area secured their higher involvement in manufacturing, trade and white-collar jobs, while mostly rural Serbian population has primarily been engaged in agricultural activities.

Figure 4.2: Ethnic composition of the municipality of Bijeljina with 1991 administrative structure, Population census 1991



Source: Author; Data source: Državni Zavod za statistiku Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Nacionalni sastav stanovništva: rezultati po opštinama i naseljenim mjestima 1991., Statistički Bilten 234, December 1993

4.2. The armed conflict in Bijeljina and its legacy

Following the first multi-party elections in November 1990, Bijeljina government was formed by the two national parties – Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka – SDS*), which represented the Bosnian Serb ethnic group (55 mandates), and Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije – SDA*), which represented the

Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) ethnic group (18 mandates). The former communist and non-nationalist parties, which were gathered around two party coalitions, managed to win only 27 seats in the local assembly all together. In this respect, distribution of power in Bijeljina's assembly resembled the political developments in the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina, where non-nationalist parties were defeated in all but three municipalities – Tuzla, Vareš and Novo Sarajevo, but managed to form the local government only in the former two (Andjelic 2005; Armakolas 2016).

Ever since it got constituted in December 1990, Bijeljina's government was quite inefficient. Inter-party bickering, mutual accusations, and above all opposed ethno-national interests of the two coalition partners, overshadowed the burning economic, social and security issues. In 1991, some personal conflicts within the SDA, as well as its temporary boycott of assembly sessions due to disagreements over the redistribution of governing functions, weakened this party's position and kept it largely exempted from decision-making process. The non-nationalist opposition consisted of the two multi-ethnic coalitions: SDP–DSS¹⁴ (17 seats) and SRSJ–SJ–SSO–DS¹⁵ (10 seats), but without serious leadership and unity among themselves, they did not represent any threat to the ruling coalition, keeping thus a completely marginal role in Bijeljina's political life. On the other side, with 55 seats in the local assembly –which was ten seats more than all other parties combined– the SDS managed to concentrate power in its own hands and take control over the majority of Bijeljina's institutions. Hence, despite the fact that the local government got organized on the premises of political pluralism, in practice Bijeljina was governed by one single party – the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). This fact enabled SDS to, among other, start a revanchist politics towards the previous (Communist) regime, replace managers of Semberija's public enterprises and institutions –including the local media– with the party-loyal cadres, introduce new values characteristic for the Serbian nation, its culture and religion, and declare Semberija and Majevisa as a self-proclaimed independent region alongside other

¹⁴ Namely: the League of Communist – Social-democratic Party (*Savez Komunista – Socijaldemokratska Partija – SK-SDP*) and the Democratic Socialist Alliance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Demokratski Socijalistički Savez – DSS-BiH*)

¹⁵ Namely: the Union of Reform Forces (*Savez Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije za BiH – SRSJ*); the Party of Yugoslavs (*Stranka Jugoslovena – SJ*) and the Socialist Youth Union of Yugoslavia – Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Savez Socijalističke Omladine – Demokratski Savez Bosne i Hercegovine – SSO-DS BiH*)

Serbian Autonomous regions – SAOs¹⁶. The SDS' electoral victory and subsequent political dominance in Bijeljina set the tone for the events which preceded the armed conflict in this city, as well as the outcome of the armed conflict itself.

Considering the fact that Bijeljina is located on the main route which connects the eastern and the western parts of the Serb-dominated territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that it was through Bijeljina that predominantly Serb areas in Croatia and north-western Bosnia were able to link with their 'homeland' Serbia, the city had strategic value for the Serbs and needed to be taken as quickly as possible. The armed conflict in Bijeljina lasted only several days, from 31 March to 4 April 1992, during which a Serbia-based paramilitary group Serbian Volunteer Guard (*Srpska Dobrovoljačka Garda*)¹⁷, together with the local territorial defence (*teritorijalna odbrana* – TO¹⁸) managed by SDS, occupied the city, and took it under the Serb control (Calic 2009). Bijeljina's geostrategic position, its predominantly Serb population, as well as political and institutional supremacy of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), were certainly the most decisive factors in making Bijeljina the first city in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be captured by the Bosnian Serb forces.

The four-day armed conflict in Bijeljina left behind 48 dead people, overwhelming majority of whom were civilians of Bosniak ethnicity, in addition to several Albanians and Serbs.¹⁹ Also, while the takeover of the almost exclusively Bosniak village of Janja took place peacefully on 5 April 1992 (Human Rights Watch

¹⁶ Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) started proclaiming these regions on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina with predominantly Serb population in the second half of 1991. Following political turmoil at the BiH level triggered by the nationalist parties' divergent views on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the breakup of Yugoslavia in June 1991, the self-proclamation of these autonomous regions was a reaction to the efforts of the Bosniak and Croat political representatives to preserve Bosnia and Herzegovina as a distinct, sovereign territorial unit, while SDS, on the other side, called for BiH to remain within a rump Yugoslavia.

¹⁷ The Serbian Volunteer Guard (Also known as "Arkan's Tigers") was a notorious paramilitary group led by Željko Ražnatović-Arkan. The group was formed in Serbia in 1990, and promoted as "an instrument for the defence of Serbs living outside Serbia and for the protection of Serbian interests throughout Yugoslavia". It was deployed in the Eastern Slavonian region of Croatia in 1991-1992 and in various locations in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 and 1995. In 1997, Ražnatović was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and violations of the laws of war. However, Ražnatović was assassinated in 2000, before his trial could take place (on this see: ICTY, Indictment against Ražnatović, IT-97-27, av. at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/zeljko_raznjatovic/ind/en/ark-ii970930e.pdf [accessed: 17 July 2017])

¹⁸ The Territorial Defence (TO) was a separate part of the armed forces of the socialist Yugoslavia, a military reserve police. Each republic had its own TO, while the regular army for the whole country was the Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija* - JNA).

¹⁹ In the first issue after April 1992 events in Bijeljina, *SIM Novine* (No. 265/1992) announced that there were 40 victims of the armed conflict, 34 of which were non-Serbs. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) used the number of 48 victims in total, 45 of which were non-Serbs.

2000), the takeover of Bijeljina was accompanied by substantial violence against the minority population. One of the most famous and memorable photos of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was taken by American photojournalist Ron Haviv in Bijeljina, showing a member of the Serbian Volunteer Guard kicking the bodies of murdered Bosniaks in front of the victims' family house. During the violent events in April 1992, hundreds of Bosniaks were expelled or left Bijeljina, but forcible expulsions of the Bosniak population continued until the end of the war. Some war and post-war international organisations' reports recorded that three different expulsion waves took place in Bijeljina and Janja: in April 1992 during and after the armed conflict, in August and September 1993, and from July to September 1994 (Amnesty International 1994; Human Rights Watch 2000; International Crisis Group 2000). In the cases against Republika Srpska's top political leadership, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) concluded that the expulsions were executed through discrimination, harassment, threats, forcible evictions, detainment in the local Batković camp, compulsory work services, destruction of the religious and cultural heritage objects, and other forms of ethnically motivated violence.²⁰

In the end of the 1992-1995 war, due to human losses and expulsion of the Bosniak population, Bijeljina's pre-war demographic structure significantly changed. Out of 30,229 Bosniaks in Bijeljina, fewer than 2,700 remained, while in nearby Janja there were around 200 Bosniaks, in comparison to its pre-war Bosniak population of 9,871 (Amnesty International 1994; Human Rights Watch 2000; Wubs 1998). According to the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo (*Istraživačko-dokumentacioni centar* – IDC) which produced the most comprehensive account of human losses in the Bosnian war, there were 1,100 killed or missing persons from the municipality of Bijeljina, 809 of which were Serbs, 271 Bosniaks, and 20 were of other ethnicities. Even though Bijeljina did not experience direct combat activities after April 1992, the Serb population was mobilized in protecting the city at the local front lines. Hence, Serbs were the most numerous victims among 823 killed soldiers (798), followed by 24 Bosniaks and one Croat. On the other side, Bosniaks had the largest number of civilian victims – out of 277 civilian victims in Bijeljina, 247 were Bosniaks, 11 were Serbs, and

²⁰ On this see: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), cases: Karadžić, Radovan (IT-95-5/18), Plavšić, Biljana (IT-00-39 & 40/1), Krajišnik, Momčilo (IT-00-39); official website: www.icty.org [accessed: 19 July 2017]

19 victims were of other ethnicities. Finally, out of a total number of war victims in the municipality of Bijeljina, 1,043 were men and 57 women (Tokača 2013) (see Table 4.1.).

Table 4.1: *Municipality of Bijeljina, Victims of the 1992-1995 war*

Municipality of Bijeljina Victims of the 1992-1995 war			
Ethnicity	Civilian	Soldier	Total
Albanian	9		9
Bosniak	247	24	271
Croat	1	1	2
Macedonian	5		5
Roma	3		3
Serb	11	798	809
Unknown	1		1
Total	277	823	1100

Source: Tokača, Mirsad (2013): Bosanska knjiga mrtvih - Ljudski gubici u BiH 91-95, Sarajevo: Istraživačko dokumentacioni centar

Following the Serb takeover of Bijeljina, the city got an overwhelmingly Serbian outlook. The ‘Serbian assembly’ of Bijeljina consisting of 70 assemblymen of exclusively Serb ethnicity was established, local schools, institutions, military centres and major streets got renamed, and the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church became more prominent. Religious studies were introduced as a compulsory course in all elementary schools in 1993. While Bijeljina’s five mosques were damaged in 1992 and completely demolished in March 1993, new places of worship for the Christian Orthodox believers were constructed. The first churches started being built in the village of Popovi (April 1992) and later on in Dvorovi (May 1992), where a mass christening of 285 people took place in July 1992.

Having in mind these changes, and with the number of Bosniaks rapidly decreasing, since early April 1992 the Serb population of Semberija have dominated the region in political, social and cultural sense. The Serb dominance in Bijeljina got additionally reinforced with the arrival of a large number of Serb internally displaced

persons (IDPs) who had either fled in fear, or had been forcibly expelled, from the territories controlled by the Bosniak and Croat military forces.

4.3. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bijeljina

In 1997, the International Management Group (IMG) did an assessment of the condition of the housing stock in Republika Srpska, including the municipality of Bijeljina. Out of a total number of 26,805 buildings in Bijeljina, 1,223 (4.6%) were damaged and 124 (0.5%) destroyed. Also, there were 29,928 dwellings in the municipality of Bijeljina, 1,544 (5.2%) of which were damaged (1,111 in urban and 433 in rural districts of Bijeljina), while 141 (0.5%) were destroyed (120 in urban and 21 in rural districts of Bijeljina) (Human Rights Watch 2000; Wubs 1998). These figures show that Bijeljina sustained little damage to its housing stock as a result of war activities, hence its absorbing capacity of incoming refugees and IDPs was much higher than in some other Serb-dominated municipalities. This was one of the most important reasons behind the decision of a considerable number of Serb IDPs to find temporary shelter in Bijeljina during the 1992-1995 war and its aftermath. Another important factor was Bijeljina's favourable geopolitical position, the fact that Bijeljina went under the Serb control in the very beginning of the Bosnian conflict, as well as that since early April 1992 the security conditions were sufficiently good, as there were no direct combat activities within the wider city's area.

Already in May and June 1992, around 20,000 Serb IDPs arrived to the city and its surrounding villages. In July 1992, their number increased to 30,000 (Amnesty International 1994). After the initial wave, Bijeljina's authorities had to deal with an even bigger influx of IDPs mostly from the region of Tuzla, Zenica and Sarajevo, therefore this number kept increasing until the end of the war. Also, a considerable number out of approximately 80-100,000 Serbs who fled the formerly Serb-held Sarajevo suburbs after the DPA was signed (Amnesty International 2000; Sell 1999), found refuge in the municipalities in the eastern and northern RS, mostly in Višegrad, Brčko and Bijeljina. Although there are no official data on the precise number of IDPs in Bijeljina throughout the war years, in the interviews for *SIM Novine* the local officials' estimations ranged from 40,000 in June 1993, 30-35,000 in the end of 1995, to 50,000

in the beginning of 1997. In 1997, it was estimated that at least 50 per cent of all school children in Bijeljina came from displaced families.

In the immediate post-war period, numerous estimations were made with regards to the number of displaced persons in Bijeljina. In the cases where estimations were produced without conducting a serious investigation in the field, it was highly probable that the numbers were exaggerated to some extent. The data which came out as a result of the more systematic and more organized population counts, also risked being partially misleading, as they took into account only those persons who wished to be officially registered and assigned an IDP status. Also, it could be assumed that the number of IDPs in Bijeljina varied greatly throughout years, depending on new arrivals, but also departures of that segment of the displaced population which had considered Bijeljina only their temporary shelter before they moved to another city or another country.

According to Pašalić (2004), who based his research on the data collected by the Statistic Agency of Republika Srpska, in 1996 the region of north-eastern RS (including the municipalities of Bijeljina, Ugljevik and Lopare) had a population of 137,020 people, 40,400 of which were refugees and internally displaced persons. The municipality of Bijeljina alone had a population of approximately 104,831 people, 67,625 of whom belonged to the domicile population (19,627 households), while 37,206 were refugees and internally displaced persons (11,272 households). Therefore, immediately after the 1992-1995 conflict, refugees and IDPs constituted 35.5 per cent of Bijeljina's population. Internally displaced population arrived to Bijeljina from almost 90 different municipalities in the country, majority of which were in the Bosniak and Croat-dominated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) (see Figure 4.3.). Among IDPs, the most numerous were from the wider region of Tuzla (4,198 households – 37.24 per cent), Sarajevo (2,151 households – 19.08 per cent) and Zenica (1,918 households – 17.01 per cent), making up nearly 74 per cent of the total number of displaced households in Bijeljina.²¹ When the rural and semi-rural settlements of the abovementioned regions are excluded, only from these three large urban centres

²¹ The largest number of Serb IDPs from the area of Tuzla arrived to Bijeljina from the following municipalities: Tuzla (2,958 households), Srebrenik (696), Banovići (224), Živinice (171) and Kalesija (103). From the area of Sarajevo: Visoko (448 households), Ilijaš (378), Sarajevo-Centar (303), Novo Sarajevo (291), Sarajevo-Noví Grad (228) and Ilidža (218). From the area of Zenica: Zenica (1047 households), Bugojno (403), Kakanj (276) and Novi Travnik (257) (Pašalić 2004; 2012).

around 5,500 families arrived to Bijeljina. Other municipalities from which the IDPs in Bijeljina were expelled included, among other, Krupa na Uni (258 households), Sanski Most (118 households), and Drvar (96 households) (see Table 4.2.).

Table 4.2: *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bijeljina - Municipalities with the highest number of IDPs in Bijeljina (1996)*

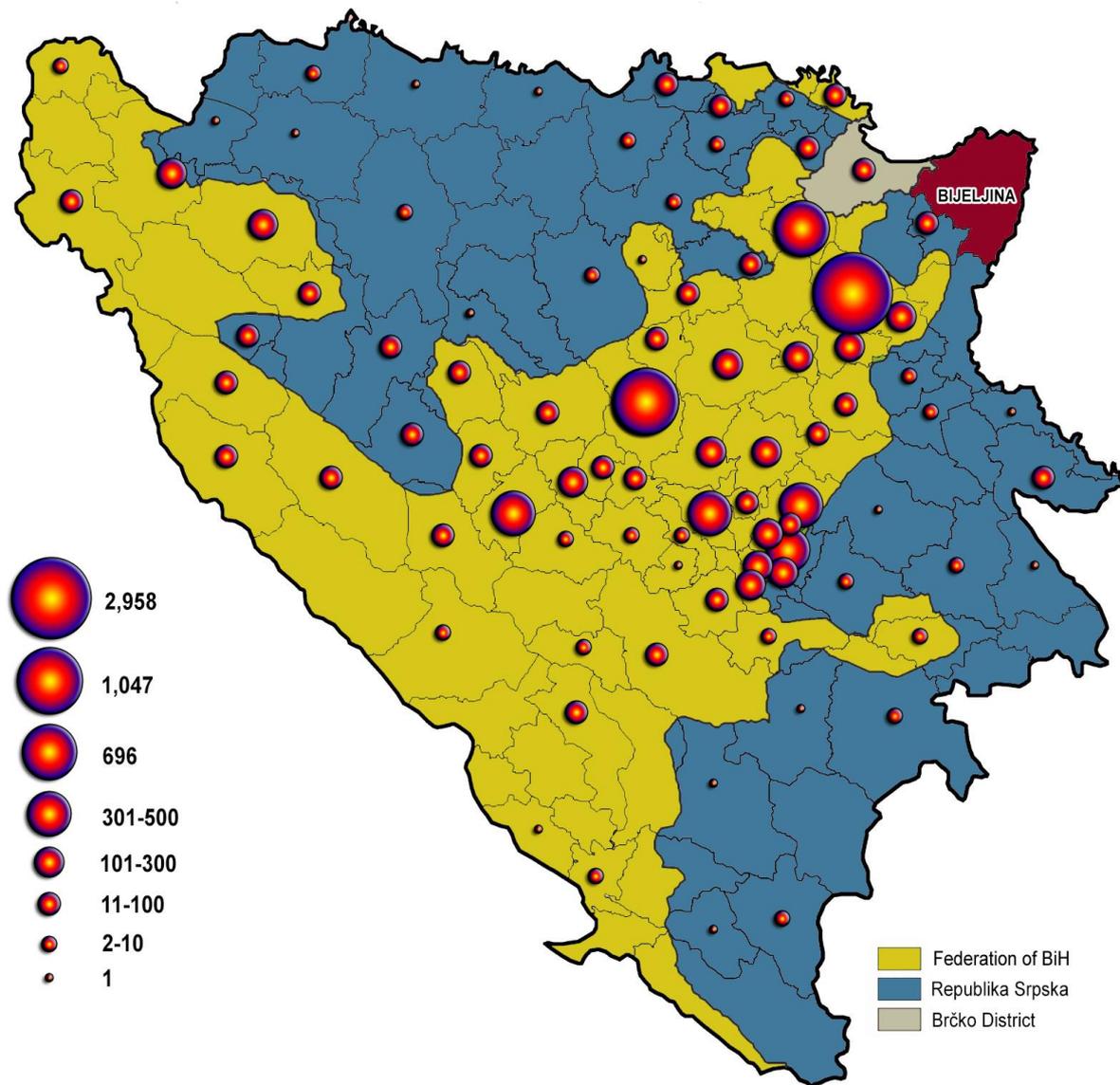
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bijeljina			
Municipalities with the highest number of IDPs in Bijeljina (1996)			
Municipality of origin	Number of households	Municipality of origin	Number of households
Tuzla	2,958	Sarajevo-Novigrad	228
Zenica	1,047	Banovići	224
Srebrenik	696	Iliđža	218
Visoko	448	Živinice	171
Bugojno	403	Zavidovići	156
Ilijaš	378	Sarajevo-Vogošća	154
Sarajevo-Centar	303	Sanski Most	118
Novo Sarajevo	291	Vareš	107
Kakanj	276	Kalesija	103
Krupa na Uni	258	Drvar	96
Novi Travnik	257	Sarajevo-Hadžići	79

Source: Pašalić, Stevo (2004): *Stanovništvo Semberije - demografska studija*, Srpsko Sarajevo: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, p. 103-104

The UNHCR's estimates in 1998 showed that Bijeljina had a population of around 119,000 people, including 113,000 Serbs, 2,000 Bosniaks and 4,000 others (mostly Croats and Roma). Among the Serb population, more than 50,000 fell under the category of internally displaced persons, majority of whom came from the areas of Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica and Drvar (Wubs 1998). In 2000, the Human Rights Watch estimated the number of IDPs in Bijeljina from 37,000 to 50,000 (Human Rights Watch 2000). Similarly, Jansen (2011) noted that with 30,000 IDPs in 2000, Bijeljina had one of the highest rates in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A more official count of the displaced population in RS took place in 2000, in cooperation between the Republika Srpska authorities and the UNHCR. According to this source, there were 27,828 IDPs in Bijeljina in 2000 (8,942 families), overwhelming majority of whom were Serbs (27,687 or 99.49

per cent). Also, from 1992 to 2001, there were 2,449 children who were born in displaced families in Bijeljina, therefore directly obtaining the IDP status (RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, personal correspondence, July 2015).

Figure 4.3: Municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina from which IDPs arrived to Bijeljina – number of households (1996)



Source: Author; Data source: Pašalić, Stevo (2004): Stanovništvo Semberije - demografska studija, Srpsko Sarajevo: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, p. 103-104

2.1.3. Early years of displacement

The local authorities struggled to accommodate such a large number of newcomers, frequently referring to Bijeljina as 'the city of refugees' [*grad izbjeglica*]. Solving the housing problem for the arriving displaced population was the local government's priority task. Initially, IDPs were welcomed to the homes of domicile population, in many instances staying with family and friends. The IDPs were also accommodated by the authorities in the houses of those citizens who were working abroad when the war started, or who fled Bijeljina immediately after the war broke out. However, in a very short period of time the number of newcomers became too high for the available housing stock, so the local authorities allowed displaced Serbs to move in with, or were assigned to houses of, Bosniaks who were still living in Bijeljina (Amnesty International 1994; Human Rights Watch 2000). This decision was in accordance with the Decree on the Allocation for Temporary Use of Housing Objects, Business and other Premises, passed by the Republika Srpska authorities in August 1992. The act stipulated that the apartments which have not been abandoned may be temporarily used for accommodation of refugees and IDPs if the owner has a surplus of living space. The subsequent Law on the Use of Abandoned Property, which was enacted in February 1996, provided an even bigger protection to the displaced population at the expense of the pre-war property owners who fled their homes, making the return process extremely difficult. The issue of the shared living space between Serb IDPs and their Bosniak hosts became highly problematic, and produced serious security concerns for the local government and the local community more broadly (Human Rights Watch 2000).

With many Bosniak neighbourhoods being emptied out but soon afterwards occupied by Serb IDPs, Bijeljina experienced growth of entire city quarts which were almost exclusively inhabited by displaced population. In 1998, *Semblerske Novine* reported that in the local community (*mjesna zajednica* – MZ) Galac there were 3,630 inhabitants, only 275 of them belonging to the category of domicile population. Similarly, in MZ Vuk Karadžić there were 7,000 inhabitants in total, 98 per cent of which were internally displaced persons. The village of Janja with a pre-war population of around 10,000 Bosniaks, accommodated around 15,000 Serb IDPs in the immediate post-war period. For some of those IDPs who could not solve their housing problem in

this way, the three collective reception centres operated in post-war years – Amajlije, Sivi Dom and Brezovo Polje, all together accommodating a modest number of 195 people.

Even when the housing needs of the displaced population were satisfied, many of them lived under very poor socio-economic conditions. Tens of thousands of newcomers greatly impacted the local community by putting an enormous pressure on the war-torn local economy, labour market, healthcare and social security system. It was estimated that in 1998 approximately one half of the pre-war residents were unemployed, while a huge proportion of the displaced persons did not have a job. Some of the factories located in the municipality resumed their production, but it still amounted only around 15 per cent of their pre-war capacity. Also, the problem was in the fact that many IDPs from urban areas settled in the country-side and vice versa, which made them practically incapable of handling their economic possibilities (Wubs 1998). In 1997, Bijeljina's office of the Red Cross announced that humanitarian and social aid was being distributed at 76 different sites in the municipality, 16 of which were stationed in the very city of Bijeljina, while three were operating in Janja. The same source also stressed that in the pre-war period there were only 500 socially vulnerable individuals in need of some kind of social protection, but this number reached astonishing 48,000 until June 1997. In the same year, there were also 1,431 recipients of war disability benefits, as well as 1,346 recipients of financial help provided for the families of fallen soldiers.

From 1998-1999 onwards, thanks to much more direct international intervention in the return process in Bosnia and Herzegovina – primarily, the introduction of the 'property law implementation process' (PLIP) (see Chapter 3), Bosniak refugees and IDPs started returning to Bijeljina. Due to unfavourable legal conditions and the local government's obstructionism, the return of Bosniaks to Bijeljina had been almost non-existent until the end of 1998: in 1996 and 1997 no minority return was recorded, while in 1998 only four persons from minority groups had returned to Bijeljina (Human Rights Watch 2000). In December 1998, under the pressure of the international community, the Republika Srpska National Assembly passed the Law on the Cessation of Application of the Law on the Use of Abandoned Property, while the international organisations involved in the return process increased their presence in Bijeljina through, among other, appointing the OHR's special envoy in

this city. Together with a new set of property laws (see Chapter 3), these measures helped in making the process of minority return more feasible, which was evident in 1999, when around 500 members of the minority groups returned to Bijeljina (Human Rights Watch 2000). In the early 2001, based on the reports of the international organisations, *Semblerske Novine* reported that over 3,000 Bosniaks returned to the city of Bijeljina, and 1,500 to Janja. Only a year later, half of Janja's pre-war Bosniak population returned to their homes.

With the return of Bosniaks, predicament of Bijeljina's IDPs became even more severe. Given the international community's accent on a speedy process of minority return (see Chapter 3), many Bijeljinan IDPs found themselves in a difficult position where they needed to promptly cede temporary occupied properties to the Bosniak owners, while conditions had not yet been met for their own return (for those who wished to do so), or for reclaim of their properties in the pre-war homes in FBiH (in case they wanted to sell or exchange these properties and resettle in Bijeljina). Similarly to the Republika Srpska property regulation, during the war, and subsequently in 1995 and 1996, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina passed the legislation to regulate the use of 'abandoned' property, allowing their co-ethnic IDPs to move into vacant houses and flats. Together with the lack of alternative accommodation and FBiH authorities' tendency to be more sympathetic towards their co-ethnic IDPs, this regulation posed obstacle for the rightful owners to reclaim these properties (as they needed to return and live for minimum two years in their apartments before being able to sell them) (International Crisis Group 1997), at least until the pressure of the international community became stronger in the late 1990s. Importantly, although right to return and right to property reclaim was equally guaranteed to both Serb IDPs in Bijeljina and Bosniak refugees and IDPs from Bijeljina, the conditions were more favourable for the latter category of displaced persons, as houses and other properties in Bijeljina were spared from physical destruction during the war, which was not the case with the properties of many IDPs who left or were expelled from the FBiH and found their refuge in Bijeljina (especially from rural areas of FBiH)²². This fact was inconvenient for both Bijeljinan IDPs who wished to return (as they needed to apply for humanitarian aid and reconstruct their houses first), and for Bijeljinan IDPs who wished

²² For example, in an interview for *Semblerske Novine* (397/2000) the mayor of Bijeljina stated that there are 15,000 Serb IDPs in Janja (from wider regions of Bugojno, Zenica, Krupa and Sarajevo), 70 per cent of whom had their houses and apartments completely destroyed, thus having nowhere to return.

to resettle (as they had no property to sell or exchange and secure accommodation in Bijeljina upon leaving Bosniak houses). Thus, alongside their respective ethno-national elites' encouragement to stay at the territory controlled by their own ethnic group (see below), some other important factors – such as destroyed property, unfavourable property laws, and security concerns, played a major role in Bijeljinan IDPs' reluctance to return. In 1996, out of a total number of 11,272 displaced households in Bijeljina, only 77 households expressed their willingness to return to FBiH, while 133 wished to return to their pre-war homes at the territory of Serb-dominated Republika Srpska. A large number of 9,976 households opted for remaining in Bijeljina: 3,898 households wished to stay in the current accommodation, and 6,078 wanted to continue their life in Bijeljina, but in some other accommodation. At the same time, 3,154 displaced households expressed their desire to move to Bijeljina from some other municipalities in Republika Srpska (Pašalić 2004).

2.1.4. Resettlement

In cases where displaced Serbs did not want to or could not return to their pre-war homes but needed to cede occupied properties to the Bosniak returnees, suitable alternative accommodation needed to be provided. Bijeljinan authorities have led several projects to provide accommodation to the IDPs, some of which were realized in cooperation with foreign donors. In 1998, The German governmental development agency named Technical Cooperation Agency (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* – GTZ) initiated a project in which 36 apartments were built for Serb IDPs. While GTZ sponsored construction of the nine buildings, each consisting of four apartments, the Bijeljinan municipality provided the land on which they were built, and all the necessary documentation for the infrastructure. In 2000, GTZ built 104 more apartments for the same category of displaced population in Bijeljina. The idea behind this project was to provide alternative accommodation for those Serb IDPs who were occupying the houses of Bosniak refugees from Bijeljina that were at that time living in Germany. Therefore, the project aimed at enabling at least some of the 14,000 Bosniak refugees from Bijeljina to return to their homes, relieving, at the same time, Germany's

immense caseload of Bosnian refugees. The project was criticized by the international community for investing in relocation, rather than in minority return. Even though the IDPs did not acquire property rights over the apartments but got to use them only until the final solution for their housing problem was found, it was believed that the GTZ project actually encouraged displaced Serbs not to return to their pre-war homes. Thus, with many IDPs remaining in Bijeljina, the results of the war-time ethnic cleansing got furthermore solidified (Human Rights Watch 2000).

The same criticism was directed towards the local government in Bijeljina, concerning its decision to allocate free plots of land to the IDPs who could not return to their pre-war properties. The international authorities involved in Annex 7 implementation process found these and similar initiatives unacceptable. In some instances, the municipality's ownership of this land was highly contested, as the plots of land intended for free allocation were socially-owned, or they allegedly belonged to the Bosniak families which left the city during the war. In 1999, the international authorities intervened by prohibiting assignment of the socially-owned land until property rights were entirely resolved. In Bijeljina in concrete, such temporary prohibition entered into force in May 2000. The main objection, however, stood in the belief that the land allocation to co-ethnic IDPs was being part of ethnic engineering – the policy which was in direct confrontation with the international community's aim to reverse ethnic cleansing (see Chapter 3). In its report from 2002, the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that the most intensive land allocation was taking place in several municipalities in the eastern RS, Bijeljina being one of the most outstanding examples, alongside Zvornik (International Crisis Group 2002; also Toal and Dahlman 2011). Also, various organisations which advocated relocation of displaced Serbs within Republika Srpska were founded. The most prominent of them, *Ostanak* [Staying put], emerged in Bijeljina in 1998 and it was a major force in pushing for allocation of land within Republika Srpska as resettlement sites for the Serb IDPs (Toal and Dahlman 2011; see also Harvey 2006). At the same time, the local authorities in Bijeljina were criticized for prolonging the return of Bosniak refugees and IDPs, and for not creating the necessary conditions to make the return of minority population sustainable. Also, the OHR condemned Bijeljinan authorities in 2003 for using more funding from the municipality's budget for resettlement of their co-ethnic IDPs than for minority returns

(for example, in 2002 the municipality allocated 50,000 KM²³ while in 2003 it allocated 70,000 KM for minority return, while the funds for building alternative accommodation for IDPs amounted 200,000 KM in 2002 and 450,000 KM in 2003) (*Semblerske Novine* 471/2003). Alongside several other cities in the Republika Srpska, due to its low performance in securing sustainable return of the minority population, the municipality of Bijeljina was under the sanctions of the USA administration from 2001 to 2008, unable to use substantial donor funds for post-war reconstruction which were available to many other municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In spite of the international community's firm stance with regards to this question, the authorities in Bijeljina have managed to find a way to push forward several of such land allocation initiatives. A former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina confirmed that in the immediate post-war period, despite strong stance against ethnic engineering, the international authorities tolerated land allocation in Bijeljina to a certain level. This was because Bijeljina was shortly led by the moderate Democratic Party of Republika Srpska (*Demokratska Stranka Republike Srpske* – DS RS) which was the main opponent to the nationalist Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). As the international community wanted to minimize the effects of the SDS' nationalist policies and its obstructionist attitude towards return process, it supported other political entities which expressed more readiness to cooperate, even if it meant making some concessions from time to time. The local authorities, on their side, strongly encouraged return whenever IDPs expressed their willingness to leave Bijeljina, and established contacts with the authorities in FBiH (mostly in Tuzla) in order to arrange the process of two-way return between Bijeljina and the FBiH municipalities in question (Interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina).

In 1998, the municipality of Bijeljina announced the plan for providing small plots of land free of charge for those Serb IDPs who, due to complete destruction of their pre-war property, did not have a place to return. This initiative presupposed handing out building sites of 300 square meters each, which were envisaged to potentially solve the housing problem for approximately 8,000 IDPs. As *Semblerske Novine* reported in 1999, out of a total number of 2,099 plots of land, some would be sold in order to cover

²³ Convertible mark [*konvertibilna marka* - KM] is the currency of Bosnia and Herzegovina established by the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, and introduced three years later, in 1998.

the expenses for the remaining 1,574 parcels which would be given to IDPs without financial compensation. The displaced persons, however, would have to get construction material and build the houses themselves. In 2000, the municipality of Bijeljina bought 23 hectares of land in Janja for about 250 IDPs' families, while some privately owned land in Janja was donated to Bijeljinan IDPs by the owner. In cooperation with the Republika Srpska authorities, the local government provided land for building different alternative accommodation in Amajlije and Janja for those IDPs who lived under extremely poor conditions in some of Bijeljina's collective centres. Also, the local authorities got involved in several other smaller projects in cooperation with some of Bijeljina's local businesses. In 1998, in the village of Velika Obarska, the municipality provided land for about 100 building sites for the employees of several firms, including Zlatibor, Orao, Grad and BN Putevi, while the firms themselves covered the expenses for the infrastructure.

Contrary to the international community's highly critical stance, a former Bijeljina's high-ranked official described in a personal interview that the post-war land allocation was nothing but a matter of necessity. First, at the time when the international community pushed for a quick process of minority return, Bijeljina's IDPs could not be forced to return to their pre-war homes if they did not wish to do so. The Annex 7 of the DPA stipulated that refugees and displaced persons had the right freely to return to their places of origin, and that choice of destination shall be up to the individual or family. Furthermore, the parties were obliged not to interfere with the returnees' choice of destination, or to compel them to remain in or move to situations of serious danger or insecurity, as well as to areas lacking in the basic infrastructure necessary to resume a normal life (DPA, Annex 7, Article 1 and 4). This meant that the decision whether to return or relocate was entirely in the hands of the displaced population, and the authorities needed to make sure that whatever choice was made, it was made completely voluntary (Interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina).

Second, in the already mentioned interview, it has been stressed that the local government in Bijeljina made sure that free plots of land were allocated only to the most vulnerable categories of internally displaced persons, who were not able to return to their pre-war homes, neither to provide an alternative accommodation on their own. The allocation of building sites without financial compensation took place after carefully

conducted application process, in which the highest priority was given to war invalids, families of fallen soldiers, families which lived in collective centres, as well as those IDPs whose pre-war property was completely destroyed, so they simply did not have a place to return. Hence, the land allocation in post-war years has also been justified through its strong humanitarian and social dimension (Interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina).

Finally, although obstructionism of the local Bijeljina government to the return process was evident, Bosniak refugees and IDPs were able to come into repossession of their properties in Bijeljina way faster than Serb IDPs could do with their properties in FBiH, as housing stock in Bijeljina was almost kept intact during the war, while Serb properties in FBiH, in many cases, needed reconstruction or re-building from scratch. With Bosniak population returning to Bijeljina, serious security concerns had been raised. In the mid-2000s, thousands of Bosniaks returned to Bijeljina, while the city still hosted approximately 46-50,000 internally displaced Serbs.²⁴ The international organisations reported numerous violent incidents and other criminal acts which followed the return of Bosniaks to Bijeljina, occurring between IDPs and the authorities which undertook the eviction process, as well as between IDPs and Bosniak returnees (Amnesty International 2000; Human Rights Watch 2000; Wubs 1998). The returnees to Bijeljina complained about being abused by the Serb IDPs who perceived their obligation to leave occupied property as an obvious act of injustice. *Semberske Novine* recorded numerous protests against evictions in which the IDPs raised their voice against the local government, as well as against other BiH authorities. Displaced population felt betrayed by their local government which failed to find solution for IDP's housing problem *before* it allowed for Bosniaks to return. They also felt discriminated by the Bosniak and Croat authorities in FBiH who, in their view, did not respond to the IDPs' property claims as adequately and promptly as the Serb authorities in Bijeljina did for the Bosniaks. When the return process reached its peak in 2001, there were 28,000 agonized IDPs in Bijeljina in need of alternative accommodation, while there were only

²⁴ Quoting the local authorities, but also the high-ranked BiH politicians who visited Bijeljina at the time, *Semberske Novine* reported in 2005 that there were between 14,000 and 18,500 Bosniak returnees in the municipality of Bijeljina. This number was probably exaggerated as some more reliable sources mentioned the number of 10,000 Bosniak returnees five years later (UZOPI BiH 2010). Also, the latter number seems more adequate given the official number of 13,090 Bosniaks who lived in Bijeljina in 2013 (Population Census 2013). However, it could be possible that during the early process of minority return the authorities counted the number of property-return claims which did not correspond to the number of actual returns, as many Bosniaks decided to sell or rent their properties after successful reclaim.

over a hundred housing units available for this purpose. Such a large number of IDPs who were in despair over the possibility of living in the street, only aggravated an already difficult security situation. Hence, the government of Bijeljina needed to make a quick decision of land allocation in order to accommodate as many people as possible (Interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina).

Alongside the areas in which free plots of land were distributed to the particular categories of displaced persons, as well as in the numerous other parts of Bijeljina's municipality, a considerable number of Serb IDPs decided to build their new homes and permanently settle down in the region. In 2003, *Semblerske Novine* reported that in the city's neighbourhood Galac there was a newly-built settlement for around 200 IDPs' families, majority of which came from Tuzla, Sarajevo and Zenica, while in 2004, the Bijeljina's neighbourhood Koviljuše hosted around 300 displaced families. The new settlement emerged in Janja too, where nearly 1,000 houses were built until February 2005. Novi Dvorovi was another major 'refugee settlement' [*izbjegličko naselje*] in Bijeljina with approximately 400 dwellings and population of 1,600 people until February 2006. In 2008, MZ Ledinci had a population of 17,000 people, half of which were displaced Serbs which settled down in Bijeljina's Pet Jezera neighbourhood. With the Bosniak population being unable or hesitant to return – many of them had been selling their properties after successful reclaim (Toal and O'Loughlin 2009), and with a significant number of Serb IDPs taking root in the region, Bijeljina experienced profound changes in its demographic structure, which consequently made a great impact on the local economy, society and culture.

4.4. Contemporary Bijeljina

In October 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted its first population census since 1991, but the final results were published almost three years later, in July 2016. According to this data, Bijeljina was a home of 107,715 people, 91,784 of whom were Serbs, 13,090 Bosniaks, 515 Croats and the rest were of other ethnicities, including 151 persons who still declared themselves as Yugoslavs. Hence, when compared to the 1991

population census, the share of Serbs increased from 59.17 per cent in 1991 to 85.21 per cent in 2013. On the other side, the share of Bosniaks more than halved, going from 31.17 per cent in 1991 to 12.15 per cent in 2013. The urban area has lost its pre-war Bosniak majority, having a population of 42,278 people, 35,798 of whom are Serbs (84.67 per cent, up from 28.69 in 1991), and only 4,469 Bosniaks (10.57 per cent, down from 52.24 in 1991). The village of Janja, however, have remained overwhelmingly Bosniak – in 2013, there were 11,710 inhabitants of this village, 8,532 of whom were Bosniaks (72.86 per cent) and 3,054 Serbs (26.08 per cent) (Population census 2013, Book 2, Brochure 2.2.). Also, the post-war ethnic homogenisation has become noticeable in Bijeljina too. In 1991, there was 9.66 per cent of Bijeljina’s citizens who did not belong to neither of the two main ethnic groups in Bijeljina (Bosniak and Serb), while in 2013 this percentage fell down to only 2.64 (see Table 4.3.).

Table 4.3: *Ethnic composition of the municipality of Bijeljina: Population Census 1991 and 2013 compared*

Ethnic composition of the municipality of Bijeljina: Population Census 1991 and 2013 (Comparison)				
Ethnicity	1991	2013	1991 (%)	2013 (%)
Bosniaks	30,229	13,090	31.17	12.15
Serbs	57,389	91,784	59.17	85.21
Croats	492	515	0.51	0.48
Rest	8,878	2,326	9.15	2.16
Total (municipality)	96,988	107,715	100	100

Source: Državni Zavod za statistiku Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Nacionalni sastav stanovništva: rezultati po opštinama i naseljenim mjestima 1991., Statistički Bilten 234, December 1993 and Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Census of population, households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013, Final Results, Sarajevo 2016

Although only less than a half of the pre-war Bosniak population has returned, Bijeljina is often mentioned as a positive example as far as the minority return is concerned, especially because the property-return process has been successfully completed, and over 86 per cent of the pre-war Bosniak population of Janja has come back to their homes after displacement. Janja is referred to as the place with the largest number of

returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a model for ethnic co-existence, given the fact that alongside Bosniak returnees, thousands of Serbs, mostly former IDPs from 32 different municipalities and residing in 820 households, have settled down in this village.²⁵ Also, during the 2000s, all mosques in Bijeljina were reconstructed and the Islamic religious services restored. The Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) has been participating in the work of the local Bijeljina's government.

Nevertheless, given its ethnic structure as recorded in the 2013 population census, contemporary Bijeljina is a predominantly Serbian city. This fact is especially relevant if put in the post-war context in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where ethnicity continues to shape virtually all spheres of political and social life. Bijeljina is considered to be the stronghold of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) which, except for some short periods of time, has confidently ruled in the city ever since the first multiparty elections in 1990. As it has been the case with the entire post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion has become an important identity marker, tightly connected to one's ethnic identity. The Serbian Orthodox Church has been an influential factor in lives of the majority of Bijeljina's Serbs. In the 2013 population census, 99.63 per cent of Bijeljina's Serbs declared to be of the Orthodox Christian religion (Population census 2013, Book 2, Brochure 5.1.). With the Serb political leadership in power, an overwhelmingly Serbian population, and an indisputable influence of the Serb religious authorities, in Bijeljina it is the Serbs who hold the monopoly over all those issues which are of crucial importance for the functioning of a multi-ethnic community in the post-war Bosnia. To name just a few, these issues range from still-very-sensitive topics of the official wartime narratives, memories, commemorative practices and prosecution of war-time criminals, to the questions of linguistic, religious and cultural prerogatives. Majority of Bijeljina Serbs, regardless of their gender, age, and education, are either unaware of severity and scope of war crimes conducted against Bijeljina Bosniaks, or they choose

²⁵ See, for example: „*Janja, simbol suživota*“, RTS, 5 April 2012, av. at: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/1076962/janja-simbol-suzivota.html> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; Ljubojević, Aljoša: „*Janja: Primjer suživota, ali gdje je život?*“, Al Jazeera Balkans, 2 October 2015, av. at: <http://balkans.aljazeera.com/vijesti/janja-primjer-suzivota-ali-gdje-je-zivot> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; „*Janja - mjesto suživota Bošnjaka i Srba*“, N1 Info, 15 February 2015, av. at: <http://ba.n1info.com/a25918/Vijesti/Vijesti/Suzivot-Bosnjaka-i-Srba-u-Janji.html> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; Marković, Anđelka (215): „*Suživot u Janji: Pod istim krovom uče se i bosanski i srpski*“, N1 Info, 7 September 2015, av. at: <http://ba.n1info.com/a59014/Vijesti/Vijesti/Suzivot-u-Janji-Pod-istim-krovom-uce-se-i-bosanski-i-srpski.html> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; „*Janja simbol saživota Bošnjaka i Srba: Posao i egzistencija zajednički problem*“, Info Bijeljina, 13 April 2018, av. at: <https://www.infobijeljina.com/34030-Janja-simbol-sazivota-Bosnjaka-i-Srba-Posao-i-egzistencija-zajednicki-problem.html> [accessed: 13 April 2018].

to remain silent or disengaged from the necessary process of dealing with the past. In other words, with only one ethnic group shaping policies in Bijeljina, ethnic tolerance remains low, and the society far from reconciliation.²⁶

With regards to the Serbian ethnic body in particular, the census data on migration patterns have offered more details on the number of former internally displaced persons who now have their residence in Bijeljina. More concretely, the census showed that in 2013 there were 34,868 people residing in Bijeljina who at some point had the status of the internally displaced persons. Translated into percentages, it is 32.37 per cent of the total Bijeljina's population. Among them, 27,652 or 79.30 per cent were displaced from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6,177 from the Republika Srpska (17.72 per cent), and 262 from the territory of Brčko District (0.75 per cent) (see Table 4.4.). When presented in terms of their ethnicity/national affiliation, there were 4,726 Bosniaks in Bijeljina who experienced internal displacement, 209 Croats, and –what is of particular importance for this study– 29,620 Serbs. Hence, 32.27 per cent of all Bijeljina's Serbs had the status of internally displaced persons in the war and post-war years (Population census 2013, Book 8, Brochures 7.1. and 8.1.) (see Table 4.5.).

Table 4.4: *Municipality of Bijeljina (2013): Population displaced after 30/04/1991 according to region from which they are displaced*

Municipality of Bijeljina (2013) Population displaced after 30/04/1991 according to region from which they are displaced		
From Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)	27,652	79.30%
From Republika Srpska (RS)	6,177	17.72%
From Brčko District (BD)	262	0.75%
Unknown	777	2.23%
Total	34,868	

Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Census of population, households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013, Book 8: Migration, Brochure 7.1.*

²⁶ See, for example: Musli, Emir: "25 godina nakon zločina u Bijeljini", Deutsche Welle, 2 April 2017, av. at: <http://www.dw.com/hr/25-godina-nakon-zlo%C4%8Dina-u-bijeljini/a-38231792> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; Maglajlija, Vedrana: „Arkanov teatar smrti u Bijeljini“, Al Jazeera Balkans, 9 April 2017, av. at: <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/arkanov-teatar-smrti-u-bijeljini> [accessed: 27 July 2017]

It is important to note that this number does not explicitly include only those categories of population who were forcibly moved to Bijeljina as their first displacement destination, and then decided to resettle at the territory of Bijeljina's municipality, as described in this chapter. The data includes any persons who at some point after 30 April 1991 had the status of the internally displaced persons, so these could also be the persons who were displaced to some other region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and only recently moved to Bijeljina on a completely voluntary basis. The number of 34,868 persons in Bijeljina which have experienced internal displacement is especially interesting when compared to the number of those Bijeljina citizens which have always lived in this city (Bijeljina's domicile population). The number of people who were born in Bijeljina and still live in the same place is 34,503 (32.02 per cent), which is slightly lower than the number of the former IDPs residing in Bijeljina, and more than twice lower than the overall number of both voluntary and involuntary newcomers to the city (73,212 or 67.96 per cent) (Population census 2013, Book 8, Brochure 1.1).

Table 4.5: *Municipality of Bijeljina (2013): The displaced population after 30/04/1991 considering their ethnicity/national affiliation*

Municipality of Bijeljina (2013) The displaced population after 30/04/1991 considering their ethnicity/national affiliation		
Bosniaks	4,726	13.55%
Serbs	29,620	84.95%
Croats	209	0.60%
Others	214	0.61%
Undeclared & Unknown	99	0.28%
Total	34,868	

Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Census of population, households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013, Book 8: Migration, Brochure 8.1.

If we speak in legal terms, in majority of cases the persons which came to Bijeljina as internally displaced population have in the meantime lost this status. However,

according to the data of the RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, in 2015 there were still 5,642 people (or 1,850 households) registered as internally displaced persons, overwhelming majority of whom were Serbs (1,841 households). These were usually elderly and some more vulnerable categories of population which have opted not to renounce their IDPs status, presumably with the aim to obtain or preserve certain legally granted privileges (RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, personal correspondence, July 2015).²⁷ In 2015, there were also 320 families in Bijeljina which still lived in alternative accommodation (Bijeljina's Office of the Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, personal correspondence, May 2015).

More than twenty years have passed since the war ended, and more-or-less the same amount of time since the IDPs in Bijeljina decided to permanently settle in this city. Despite the fact that majority of them have lost the legal status of internally displaced persons, the word 'refugee' [*izbjeglica*, singular] can often be heard in everyday discourse of Bijeljina's inhabitants. The infrastructural projects are still ongoing in the newly-built settlements in Bijeljina where Bijeljina's IDPs have created their post-war homes.²⁸ The settlements with predominantly IDPs population are called *izbjeglička naselja*, meaning 'refugee settlements', many of them carrying a distinguishable adjective *novi-a-o* [new] in front of their name (such as Novo Naselje, Nova Janja, Novi Dvorovi, etc.). The Union for sustainable return and integrations (*Unija za održivi povratak i integracije* - UZOPI) documented in 2014 that out of 70 territorial units (*mjesne zajednice* – MZ) within the city of Bijeljina, the formerly displaced population and returnees lived in 62 of them. The displaced population constituted majority in 26 of these MZs, while in two of them the IDPs lived alongside the Bosniak and other returnees in Bijeljina (UZOPI BiH 2014).²⁹

²⁷ This assertion is extracted from the data of the RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, which showed that among these 5,642 IDPs in Bijeljina, there were 1,849 people older than 60. Also, besides 782 pensioners, 2,870 of them were unemployed, while an additional number of 1,130 were looking for some kind of employment, which probably means that over 70 per cent of these IDPs did not receive any income (RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, personal correspondence, July 2015).

²⁸ See, for example: „Asfaltirane ulice u izbjegličkom naselju u Bijeljini“, Info Bijeljina, 25 September 2016, av. at: <https://www.infobijeljina.com/16944-Asfaltirane-ulice-u-izbjegličkom-naselju-u-Bijeljini.html> [accessed: 27 July 2017]; Tadić, Nataša (2017): „Pomoć Srbima koji su izbjegli ili doselili iz 32 bh. Opštine“, N1 Info, 27 July 2017, av. at: <http://ba.n1info.com/a176766/Vijesti/Vijesti/Pomoc-izbjeglim-Srbima.html> [accessed: 27 July 2017]

²⁹ According to the same source, in the municipality of Bijeljina there are also 11 territorial units predominantly inhabited by the returnees to this city.

This chapter offered a background information on the number and origins of Bijeljina's IDPs and presented some major obstacles in their early integration process, including the local government's response to these obstacles through sponsoring and co-sponsoring the resettlement programme. How the local population felt affected by the arrival of their co-ethnic IDPs, will be the subject of the subsequent chapters of this study. Also, this chapter introduced the specific field setting in which the research for this study has been conducted. It showed the way in which the war and population displacement has transformed Bijeljina from a middle-sized, multi-ethnic Bosnian town into the second-largest city in Republika Srpska, dominated by the Serbs in the political, social and cultural sense.

The following chapters will focus more closely on those categories of IDPs who were displaced to Bijeljina in the war and post-war period but decided not to return to their pre-war homes, integrating in the local community instead. They will explore the perspective of these very IDPs with regards to their displacement experience and the affect it had on their identity-formation and transformation process. Whether this humanitarian label has become a social category and identity on the ground, and how the displacement experience has influenced their perception of the selves and the other, will be some of the main questions explored in the chapters that follow.

5. The Things That Bind Us: Being an *Izbjeglica* in Bijeljina

5.1. Being forcibly displaced in Bijeljina

At first, I was not afraid. [It's because] I believed there will be no war; maybe some sporadic violent episodes, but no, nothing as devastating as war... [Branko (83), 10 December 2017, Dvorovi]³⁰

Nobody could even imagine that something as horrible as war would happen to all of us... [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

A lot of people didn't even know what war is. When it all started, people were not aware that's what a war looks like... I couldn't truly understand what was going on around me... When it started shooting in April [1992], I still didn't realise that the conflict would be of such great proportions. I thought it would be over soon... [...] Sarajevo was blocked, there were barricades on the roads, there were armed men patrolling, and my friends told me that snipers are basically everywhere... I didn't even know what a sniper is... How was I supposed to protect myself from snipers when I didn't even know what these snipers are? [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

It was so unexpected... I couldn't believe that in these modern times, in this century, war could happen, and people could hate each other so much... I have never hated anybody in my life! [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

You could feel in the air that something was about to happen... It [the war] had already started in Brčko, Bijeljina, Zvornik, but we just sat in our apartments and kept saying to ourselves that there's no way that it could also happen to us in Tuzla... [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

³⁰ All the personal names throughout the thesis were changed to fully protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.

To us, locals, the question of who was going to rule over us – Muslims or Croats, was not important at all... We were just waiting for the day when the takeover of power would take place, for nationalists to come to power, and we would continue living and working as usual... Why would we care if a Muslim, Croat or a Serb is in power? [...] I couldn't care less whose Maglaj was going to be, I just wanted to stay in my house... That's the way all of us were thinking... Let them be in power, we would sign that we are loyal, we would be equal with everybody else... If a particular law applies to them [Muslims and Croats], it would apply to us, too... That's what we were all thinking... [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

We lived [together] very well before the war. Nobody could imagine that somebody who is your first neighbour today, would be your 'number one' enemy tomorrow... [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

The above excerpts reveal the manner in which a large majority of my interlocutors talked about that period of uncertainty and confusion which preceded the 1992-1995 war and population displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For that segment of displaced Serb population in Bijeljina which did not actively participate in their pre-war communities' political affairs, the war and forcible displacement were extremely shocking events that only few of them could predict, but almost none of them, until the very last moment, actually believed that such traumatic events were truly going to happen. They also stated that their pre-war fellow citizens who were part of the local political structures, were way more informed about the upcoming armed conflict. Regardless of which of the three main ethnic groups they represented, the local politicians and other policymakers were in position to react on time in protecting their properties and keeping their family members safe.

That 'something could be felt in the air' [*nešto se osjećalo u vazduhu*] was a very frequently used description of what the life and social relations in different local communities in pre-war Bosnia looked and felt like. This 'something' was a feeling of uneasiness and distress caused by the rising ethnic tensions in my interlocutors' immediate social surroundings, which thrived below the mask of a tolerant and peaceful multi-ethnic environment that each of these local societies strived to put on. Yet, despite this obvious 'air pollution', a large majority of my interlocutors thought that war was simply out of question. Similarly, Loizos (2008) stressed how the Argaki villagers in

Cyprus until the very last moment did not seem to have supposed that war would come to their own doors, although the accounts of rape, killing of civilians and looting throughout the country, had come to their village, too. Only when Turkish tanks arrived in the proximity of their very village, did they become truly aware of the incoming war. In other words, for the villagers of Argaki “the Turkish advance had to be *visible* before it was *credible*” (205). According to my own interlocutors in Bijeljina, in some instances, the nationalists-led local governments were responsible for keeping the local population wrongfully assured that the social relations were remaining intact, while, on the other side, they persuaded their narrow ethno-national aims and secretly prepared for the war. Elsewhere, as the excerpts from the opening of this chapter illustrate, it was the local population which, out of true conviction of simple naivety, played a major role in collective unpreparedness for the profoundly disturbing violent events which were going to change their lives forever.

2.1.5. Displacement

The similar feeling of disbelief and confusion also existed after my interlocutors fled in fear, or were forcibly displaced, from their homes in different towns and villages situated in the Bosniak and Croat-controlled territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For many of them, displacement occurred abruptly because of an immediate danger for their lives. These people left their homes with only few bags of the most basic belongings, and with complete absence of a clear plan where should they go, except that it should be someplace safe. Such were the cases of en masse displacement from the majority-Serb villages in Tuzla municipality and the Majevisa Mountain in the early summer of 1992, as well as from the villages of Potpeć, Tinja and Smoluća in the municipality of Lukavac, who, after spending three months in besiegement, found refuge in Bijeljina in August 1992. Another large-scale displacement occurred in the summer and autumn of 1995 from the regions of Bosanska Krajina and the Ozren Mountain, after these territories, previously held by Serbs, got captured by Croat and Bosniak forces. IDPs from the region of Central Bosnia, including the municipalities of Zenica, Travnik and Bugojno, arrived to Bijeljina mostly in 1992, and mostly in a less collective way. Some of these IDPs chose Bijeljina because their relatives and friends lived or

escaped there, and some did so because of Bijeljina's vicinity to their pre-war places of residence. Others stated that the primary reason for their decision to find shelter in Bijeljina was this town's relative safety and prosperity which was preserved due to its favourable geostrategic position, and its immediate proximity to the border with Serbia.

Running from their pre-war homes and arriving to an alien physical and social environment have remained in vivid memories of Bijeljinan IDPs, and for many of them these have been extremely stressful and traumatic events. Both male and female, as well as older and younger interlocutors, remembered the smallest details concerning the day when they left their homes: from the person who helped them escape, the items they took with themselves, to the clothes they were wearing and food they were eating. As Parkin (1999) notes, the stories remembered and the items taken while fleeing their homes serve as a link between displaced persons and their lives before forcible displacement, and as minimal reminders who they are and where they come from. "When people flee from the threat of death and total dispossession, the things and stories they carry with them may be all that remains of their distinctive personhood to provide for future continuity. Take those away, that little which they have, and social death looms closer..." (314). The early days spent in Bijeljina were filled with chaos and confusion whereby many IDPs did not know where their family members were, and whether they survived expulsion at all:

That was a crazy situation, but really crazy, that for some seven days or so we absolutely didn't know where each of us was. Some three days after [we arrived to Bijeljina], my brother came from the front line, with one of our cousins. They were both minors. Father came wounded, and he was looking for us everywhere. We still didn't know where our grandparents were. Later on we heard from some people that granddad and grandma were in Mitrovica at their cousin's place. We lived in the same house with our grandparents, and we didn't know where they escaped. It was a crazy day, they suddenly started shooting at our village from all sides, and we just worried how to save our bare lives [*da sačuvamo živu glavu*]. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

More than 20 years later, some of my interlocutors are still being emotional while recalling these moments of concern for the loved ones:

It was a Sunday, we just arrived to Bijeljina... I will never forget it... [...] My mother told me: 'Let's go to the church' – although we didn't even know where

the church in Bijeljina was... We were walking through the town, here and there, it [the town] was so bleak and so empty that we couldn't find anyone to ask where the church was. It was early, maybe that's why [the town was empty], because we wanted to get on time to the morning liturgy... At some point, we heard the church bells ringing, so we literally followed that sound which indeed led us to the church. When we arrived there, it looked as if all Serbs who escaped from Tuzla agreed to be there at that exact time. Probably everybody was thinking in the same way – that going to the church was the opportunity to meet not only with God, but also with one another, to find each other, to count who is dead and who is alive, who is injured and what happened to them, and what should we all do next... There was [voice trembling]... There was weeping everywhere, and it was horrible... People crying, hugging each other, rejoicing to see each other [starts crying]... [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

As long as the 1992-1995 armed conflict lasted, confusion and chaos that followed this early displacement period went alongside IDPs' strong feeling of hope that their predicament is only temporary, and that they would be able to return to their homes soon. Many of my interlocutors stated that they managed to put through this difficult and traumatic period of their lives, only because they honestly believed that it was only a matter of time before they go back to their homes and restore their pre-war lives. Similar observation was made by Loizos (1981) in his study on Cypriot Greek refugees in Cyprus, who, even at the time of a sudden departure from their village, believed in a temporality of their displacement and even consciously left their homes empty-handed, failing to recognize just how dangerous and difficult period of their lives is awaiting for them. In the earliest weeks of their displacement, these Cypriot Greek refugees thought of themselves as "*temporary* evacuees" (120), refusing to be called 'refugees' and to behave as such (i.e. to use the government's relief programme), and hoping to return to their homes as soon as the Turkish army agrees to let them do so. My interviewee Mihajlo (39), who fled Tuzla in 1992 and spent his early displacement period in a collective reception centre in Ugljevik, some 20 kilometres away from Bijeljina, described this faith in an imminent return in this way:

First, we came to Ugljevik... So many people were there, they couldn't find shelter for all of us. Very soon, all housing capacities in Ugljevik were filled, because the incoming population was thinking they can't go to Bijeljina, it's too far away from home, like if it was over the ocean... We were thinking: it's good

we made it to Ugljevik, because tomorrow we will be going back home, the situation might change, something good will happen... People even buried their dead at the local cemetery in Priboj [bordering the territory of FBiH], near the church, believing, throughout 1992 and 1993, that the war would be over soon, and that we would return to our homes, carrying the bones of our dead with ourselves and re-burying them in our [pre-war] local cemeteries... [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

While this hope persisted throughout the wartime, it got finally lost in the end of 1995, after the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed. Large majority of my interlocutors mentioned the DPA as a major turning point in their lives after forcible expulsion. The provision of the DPA according to which these IDPs' homes remained under political, socio-economic and cultural control of the Bosniak and Croat authorities (see Chapter 3), was one of the most decisive factors in IDPs' decision not to return to their pre-war homes, but to resettle at the territory of Bijeljina municipality (see Chapter 6). For some other Bijeljina IDPs, although the DPA marked the end of the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was only the beginning of all their troubles. Such was the case with the Serbs who fled the formerly Serb-held Sarajevo suburbs after they went under the jurisdiction of the majority Bosniak and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). The Serbs from Visoko, Breza, Vareš, and Sarajevo municipalities of Vogošća, Ilijaš, Rajlovac, Ilidža and Hadžići made the last en masse arrival of displaced persons in Bijeljina in February and March 1996, several months after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally and finally over.

2.1.6. Post-displacement struggle for survival

Upon forcible displacement, just a few of my interlocutors stayed with their family members in Bijeljina, while two of them got accommodated in the apartments which initially served as a part of collective reception centres, and they have continued to use this kind of accommodation until this day. Majority of my interlocutors occupied the Bosniak-owned houses and apartments in Bijeljina (see Chapter 4), some of which were obtained through the local administrative and military structures, while in some other cases, the IDPs moved into these properties after making individual arrangements with

the Bosniak and other non-Serb (mostly Roma) families. Such arrangements were common in Bijeljina during the war. While the IDPs looked for a temporary shelter after having their own houses in FBiH occupied or destroyed, the local Bosniaks sought to accommodate displaced Serb families through a mutual (and often written) agreement, in order to prevent any possible harassment or avoid forcible seizure of their property. Such danger was coming either from certain paramilitary units which were at the time active in the region, or from some agonized displaced persons which were massively arriving to the town.

The properties occupied by the IDPs were mostly abandoned by their fleeing Bosniak and other non-Serb owners, but there were also those cases where displaced Serbs shared the living space with their non-Serb hosts in Bijeljina. Even though this cohabitation with the members of an enemy ethnic group was difficult, dangerous or humiliating for some (see below), my interlocutors mostly underlined those positive stories and bright episodes concerning their lives in the dwellings shared with the Bosniaks. Through reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, my interlocutors stressed that it was mostly women who showed more solidarity with other women who belonged to the enemy ethnic group, as both the displaced Serb and the minority Bosniak women in Bijeljina understood what it means to be concerned for lives and wellbeing of their family – and children in particular, and their common predicament made them feel compassionate towards each other's pain. While some less pleasant episodes were mentioned only briefly, my interlocutors spent considerable time depicting those occasions in which they shared precious food supplies, firewood and other goods with their Bosniak hosts, those days on which their children played together, or those situations in which they stood up for each other when physically threatened by some third party. Several of them mentioned that they still keep in touch, or even maintain close friendly relationship, with their wartime Bosniak hosts in Bijeljina. Bijeljina IDPs' avoidance to talk about less pleasant experiences with their Bosniak hosts and insistence to remember and talk only about positive episodes from this period of their lives, can partially be understood as their unwillingness to get reminded of all the inconveniences they experienced, but also as their attempt to depict a positive image of themselves, making an impact on their self-perception, as well as the way they are going to be perceived by others.

In this early period of displacement, those who managed to find a job in accordance with their education and pre-war working experience, considered themselves extremely lucky. My interlocutors often stressed that, thanks to their employment shortly after displacement, they not only managed to support their family financially, but were able to expand their social networks and integrate in the local community way faster and easier than some of those IDPs who were not given an equal opportunity. Moreover, getting a job which they were educated and trained for in their pre-war places of residence, helped them in maintaining certain level of 'normalcy' in everything but 'normal' life circumstances. One of my interviewees mentioned the case of her mother who used to work for a miserable salary in Bijeljina cadastre for years, but refused to leave this position, as everyday working routine helped her feeling more hopeful and more alike to her pre-war self.

On the other side, many of my interlocutors lived under very poor socio-economic conditions, occupying old and shabby houses and relying on humanitarian aid or their own savings, which could secure financial stability only for a very short period of time. With men mostly serving in the army, in many cases it was the IDP women who needed to find the ways to provide for their families on a daily basis. More often than not, this included their engagement in a hard physical day-work [*nadnica*] at some of Semberija's numerous agricultural holdings. Some of these IDPs were equipped for such kind of work, but many of them were also highly educated individuals who replaced their office jobs with physically demanding and low-paid work in agriculture and livestock breeding. For some, this was an extremely humiliating experience which has made influence on their perception of self and others (see below). For others, depending on their personal abilities, handling their economic possibilities proved to be an easier task, despite the fact that there were many of them who replaced their comfortable city lives with the difficult and modest lives in the village:

And then, the 'bloody' period [of my life] began... My husband was fighting in the war, and I was alone at home in the winter, with two very young children, with no job and no food, but still, we needed to keep going... So, I started going to *nadnica*. I have never even heard that somebody's doing *nadnica*, let alone for me to go through that experience! Us, *Zeničani* [people from Zenica], we are people of industry and we didn't have *nadnica*. Some people had a small garden or something like that, and that was it. Everybody was employed, and I honestly

don't remember anyone who didn't have pension – I mean the older people, and here in this region it is so much different, everybody's involved in agriculture, even the youngsters... So, as I was now left with nothing, I needed to do something. I asked my husband if I should engage in *šverc* [smuggling] in order to provide for our children, but we decided to buy two pigs instead. I knew what pigs are, and I had seen pigs before, but that was it! I used to invite my entire neighbourhood when these pigs were farrowing, because I was so afraid to be left alone with them! Little by little, I got used to this kind of work and I started breeding piglets, selling them, and I also rented ten *dunums*³¹ of agricultural land from a local Muslim man. I was really into it, I even started loving it! It was a really good and fertile land... At that time, I was still doing *nadnica*, and in exchange for my work, a man was coming to plough my land with a tractor...

MM: How did you feel doing all that work on your own?

It was a dark period of my life, but I didn't think much about it at that time... I was just praying to God that my husband remains alive, and that our children are healthy – that was all I worried about. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

In their wartime and post-war struggle for economic survival, the IDPs in Bijeljina also developed and/or mastered their skills in trade and different services. Many of my interlocutors were involved in smuggling activities [*šverc*] of various goods, such as clothes, food, cigarettes and fuel, and they had shortly obtained the reputation of exceptionally capable and successful merchants at Bijeljina's open-air black market [*buvljak* or *buvlja pijaca*]. In many cases, all family members, regardless of their gender, age, and pre-war profession, participated in their small family businesses –from buying and transferring goods across the border with Serbia, to the selling and accounting jobs– which goes along with the argument that the organizing force of kinship in economics has not been lost with urbanization, industrialization, or other processes associated with modernity, but that, on the contrary, kinship has the capability to penetrate and shape economic relations within the specific socio-political setting (Mckinnon and Cannell 2013). These family activities of Bijeljinar IDPs differed considerably from a large-scale *šverc* ongoing on a higher level, which was conducted by

³¹ *Dönüm* was the Ottoman unit of area which is still preserved and used in some former Ottoman territories. Although it varies considerably from place to place, in Bosnia and Herzegovina one *dunum* (or *dulum*) usually equals to one thousand square meters.

powerful individuals (known as war profiteers - *ratni profiteri*), and backed up by the powerful political structures at the time (see Chapter 7). Unlike these war profiteers who used unstable wartime and post-war market conditions in order to get rich, many IDPs working in Bijeljina's *buvljak* were only trying to secure enough resources for their families' everyday needs, or to provide enough savings to build their new houses or buy new apartments. As Ana (36) said referring to her family's wartime economic activities, these jobs were taken out of necessity, and no matter how incapable some people were of doing the work in question, they could not afford to give these jobs up:

We were working at *buvljak*, selling shoes. Everybody was working at *buvljak* at that time... All the money we earned, we were saving for a new house. Before the war, my father was a manager in a construction company, and my mother was a housewife. We weren't really talented for that kind of work, but everybody was doing it, so we did it, too. When we just came [to Bijeljina], father was in the army and mother was alone with my sister and me. What could she possibly do? First, she was going to *nadnica* alongside my sister which was much older than me, I was still just a child [...] Then, we were doing *šverc* of fuel, because, again, everybody was doing it, but we did some really small quantities... Then, working at *buvljak* suddenly became a thing, so we said to ourselves that we too should start a business there. At first, we were selling some small quantities of clothes and shoes, but then we kind of 'specialized' in shoes only [laughs]. We used to earn some really good money, because everybody was buying goods at *buvljak* then. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

The omnipresence of such activities gave Bijeljina reputation "as one of the capitals of the post-Yugoslav black market" (Jansen 2003: 225), while IDPs who were involved in *šverc* or were working in *buvljak* are until this day perceived by the local population as extremely resourceful [*snalažljivi*] and capable [*sposobni*] people, which sometimes reveals the locals' envy, and more often their admiration towards these newcomers. In the first case, I would hear locals complaining that many IDPs managed to provide for themselves in a dishonest and illegal way, while an agriculturalist in Semberija presumably needed to work much harder, still not being able to match the IDPs' earnings. In the second case, the locals would explain –through obvious self-criticism– that they wish they are more like IDPs, and that it is not these IDPs' fault that the local people in Semberija are not as capable, and that they are used to do the things the hard

(honest) way. In any case, given that identification is never a unilateral process in a sense that not only do we identify who we are and who other people are, but we are, at the same time, being identified by others (Jenkins (2008 [1996])), the way in which the local population saw Bijeljina IDPs regarding their economic activities during the early displacement period, has remained the part of Bijeljina IDPs' identification until this day. Bijeljina IDPs' shared economic activities, their common struggle to stand on their own two feet after displacement, together with these perceived *snalažljivost* [resourcefulness] and *sposobnost* [capability] attributed to them by the local population, are all in the basis of IDPs' *solidarnost* [solidarity] and *zajedništvo* [unity] which are some of those (less or more imagined) common features that create a unique refugee identity (see below).

2.1.7. Building houses, rebuilding lives

At the time when minority return process intensified under the pressure of the international community (see Chapters 3 and 4), some IDPs in Bijeljina had already spent a decade or more living in the Bosniak-owned houses and apartments. With Bosniak refugees and IDPs reclaiming their properties and returning to Bijeljina, the Serb IDPs needed to look for alternative ways for solving their housing problem. None of my interlocutors secured an alternative living space at the time when they needed to cede the temporary occupied properties to their Bosniak owners. As some of them admitted, they were caught unprepared as they had previously been assured, either by the local or by the entity authorities, that they could remain in possession of these properties for an indefinite amount of time. Some others believed that they could not be forced to leave the Bosniak-owned properties in Bijeljina until their own illegally occupied properties in FBiH were freed, or their destroyed properties reconstructed.

Until Bijeljina IDPs managed to get into possession of their pre-war dwellings in FBiH –which were usually sold for a lower price or exchanged for an equivalent property in Bijeljina– they rented different houses and apartments, or moved in with their relatives and friends. One of my interviewees had changed as many as 13 different accommodations before her family was finally able to solve the question of property

rights in FBiH, and build its new house in Bijeljina. The situation was even more severe for those IDPs who could not sell or exchange their possessions in FBiH, as they had been demolished or destroyed during the armed conflict. Hence, they could not secure certain financial resources by selling or renting these properties, and they faced more difficulties in their efforts to stand on their own two feet. Four of my interviewees were recipients of free plots of land sponsored by the municipality authorities (see Chapter 4), one of which was a member of a family of fallen soldiers, and two of them belonged to the category of war invalids. Three of my interviewees had temporarily been given alternative accommodation sponsored by the international organisations involved in the return process, and two of them have been living until this day in the apartments which were formerly part of a collective reception centre.

For many IDPs, the process of building their own house at the territory of Bijeljina municipality has taken a significant amount of time and financial resources. For those whose properties in FBiH were destroyed, but who needed to leave Bosniak-owned houses nonetheless, this process has certainly been even more frustrating. My interlocutors had a vivid memories of their first months spent in the newly-built housing objects in Bijeljina, which were often situated in previously uninhabited suburban areas of Bijeljina, or some of its surrounding villages. In some instances, these IDPs lived under very poor conditions in small auxiliary buildings, such as garages and different storage rooms. Others had spent several years before getting electricity and clean water, and many of them still do not have paved and illuminated streets in their newly-built 'refugee settlements' [*izbjeglička naselja*]:

I bought a plot of land and built a small shed for my tools mainly. But when I was forced to leave [Bosniak house], I had nowhere else to go, so my sick wife and me started living in that shed, for some four or five months, I think... I lived together with mice in that shed, before I was able to build a proper house. [Branko (83), 10 December 2017, Dvorovi]

We started building our own house, but it hadn't been finished yet. So, when we left the [Bosniak] house, we moved into house of my wife's brother, who also didn't have electricity. We were there from May to September, I think... Our son needed to start going to school at that time, so we decided to go to our unfinished house. It didn't have a roof, just a concrete block on the top, but we managed to provide for an exterior door and some windows. Interior doors were

all the same. You know what they were? Blankets. Those big military blankets, accompanied by two nails. Our toilet was a small wooden construction outside the house, and it also had a blanket instead of a door. We washed in our yard, but only during the night, when nobody could see us [laughs]. [Novak (53), 28 August 2016, Dvorovi]

When evictions [from Bosniak houses] started, we bought a plot of land in Dvorovi. We wanted to build a house there after we sell our house in Tuzla, but the selling process didn't really go quite as fast. We chose Dvorovi because of the low price of land – it was the agricultural land, and because my uncle had already bought a plot of land there [...] Then we started building a garage there, something small with a roof where a person could sit. But then, we suddenly needed to leave [Bosniak house], and go and live in that garage [...] with no water and no electricity... It was a fantastic experience [sarcastically]! [...] We came there and there was nothing – just fields, some people building houses here and there, no public transport, no taxi drivers, nothing... If you wanted to go to the city, you needed to hitchhike. I was studying by candlelight because we didn't have electricity... Then we were looking for some ways to get water: we dug a hole, put a big pipe into it, and pumped the water from the ground. It was such a great experience [sarcastically] when we used to open the pipe to shower, and water was full of some disgusting worms! [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

In spite of these unpleasant experiences, my interlocutors believed that it was worth all the trouble, as they were again given a chance to have a house on their own. According to their narratives concerning this issue and judging by the sentiment expressed, it seemed that the day when Bijeljina IDPs entered their newly-built houses, was also the day which marked a milestone event in their post-displacement lives. After that moment, for this particular group of re-settlers, their ties with post-war places of residence strengthened and deepened, while their bonds with the pre-war homes in FBiH weakened or got completely lost. As a consequence, they were finally able to move on with their lives, focusing on what is yet to be accomplished, instead of mourning for what has been suddenly lost. Here is how some of my interviewees remembered their first impressions after entering their newly built houses:

Our house was not finished yet and it was really modestly furnished inside. But that first night we slept in *our* house, it was such a beautiful feeling. It was as if we were in some kind of spa! [Novak (53) and Zora (50), 28 August 2016, Dvorovi]

I was able to furnish our kitchen, and rooms for the children... I furnished the entire ground floor [of the house]. First night when we entered the house, we burnt the fire, and, let me tell you, it was a paradise! My children there having their own room... my dear God, it was beautiful! My wife and I were awoken up until 1 a.m. that night, and we talked about our entire history since the war broke out, remembering what we have been through... [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

Since mid-2000s, when these houses were mostly built, large majority of my interlocutors have managed to significantly upgrade the quality of their lives. Many of them proudly presented to me their beautiful two-storey houses, their small but tastefully arranged yards, and numerous other household items they have in the meantime managed to afford. Also, many of them, and both men and women, delightfully spoke about their ability to provide an additional housing unit for their children, or to finance their education abroad. Although the way and degree in which these IDPs' living standard improved depends on their personal qualifications and qualities (thus it varies from individual to individual), some broad conclusions could nevertheless be drawn.

In general, those who preserved and brought to Bijeljina some of their pre-war possessions and financial resources, or who could sell or exchange their pre-war properties in FBiH, seem to have gone through an easier process of improving their living standard after displacement. The same applies for those who have succeeded in getting desirable employment immediately after forcible displacement, or managed to develop successful family businesses. These were usually some highly-educated individuals who filled in the working positions of fleeing Bosniak population of Bijeljina, who, on their side, held the reputation of some of Bijeljina's most eminent doctors, managers, craftsmen and tradesmen. Understandably, throughout the period of rebuilding their living space and living standard more broadly, older generations of Bijeljinan IDPs struggled more in comparison to those who were young children or teenagers at the time, and who often spoke of this segment of their post-displacement

life in a calm, sometimes even humorous manner. Finally, those whose properties in FBiH were destroyed, who fled their homes taking no possessions, as well as those who belong to some of the most vulnerable social categories of population (such as war invalids or fallen soldier's family members), have struggled the most in their efforts to build their new houses, which, in their view, meant the same as rebuilding a decent and dignified life.

5.2. *Izbjeglica* as a label

As explained in Chapter 2, being labelled in a certain way has consequences in real life. Labels communicate the complex sets of values and judgements, which, in return, have the ability to form, transform and manipulate identities (Zetter 1991; 2007). "Labelling is a socio-political process, which both influences and is influenced by refugee identities" (Vigil and Abidi 2018: 58). Local population in Bijeljina, and very often Bijeljina's political and other authorities too, use the terms *izbjeglica* [refugee] and *izbjeglice* [refugees] for all forcibly displaced persons in this city, despite the fact that they have never been refugees, but internally displaced persons [*interno raseljena lica*]. Likewise, the newly-built settlements of IDPs in Bijeljina are widely known as 'refugee settlements' [*izbjeglička naselja*]. A large majority of Bijeljinan IDPs also use the same word *izbjeglice* when they talk about themselves. Even one of the four major associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina has the word 'refugees' in its name, although it formally does not refer to this particular category of forcibly displaced population (see below).

The IDPs in Bijeljina mostly feel that the word *izbjeglica* is obsolete given the fact that more than two decades have passed since this social category was firstly introduced, and majority of them do not legally have this status anymore (see Chapter 4). What is more, already in the aftermath of the war, they made a decision not to return to their pre-war homes, but to rebuild their lives while settling down at the territory of Bijeljinan municipality, which should, in their view, serve as an additional argument for leaving the term 'refugee' in the past. Hence, as an alternative, Bijeljinan IDPs (as well as

many locals) tend to call *izbjeglice* in this city as *oni koji su došli sa strane* [literally: those who came from someplace else; newcomers].

Thus, on one side, IDPs in Bijeljina find the term 'refugee' outdated, and argue that the duration of their residence in the local society should put them in an equal position with the local Bijeljina population. On the other side, however, they reluctantly identify themselves as *Bijeljinci* [people from Bijeljina] or even less so as *Semberci* [people from Semberija]. Given the situational and contextual character of social identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), Bijeljina IDPs' understanding of 'who we are' in a sense of belonging to a certain geographical space, depends on a specific context in which this question is being raised. When Bijeljina IDPs' identification with a certain geographical space is discussed in the local society, they usually use those terms which associate them with their pre-war places and regions of residence, such as *Sarajlije* [people from Sarajevo], *Tuzlaci* [people from Tuzla], *Krajišnici* [people from the region of Bosanska Krajina], *Ozrenici* [people from the Ozren Mountain], *Zeničani* [people from Zenica], and so on. While they admitted that identification with Bijeljina *does* exist outside the context of the local society, i.e. when their origins are discussed in some other BiH region or someplace abroad, the term *Semberci* –for the reasons discussed in more details in Chapter 7– remains largely avoided and highly disliked. This stands true not only for older generations of Bijeljina IDPs, but also for those who were just children when forcible displacement occurred, or who even obtained the IDP status while being born in a displaced family in Bijeljina. These younger generations usually adopt the viewpoints of their parents and grandparents, identifying themselves with the regions, cities and villages their families were forcibly displaced from. However, unlike their older family members, they are also more inclined to be identified with Bijeljina and Bijeljina society too.

Many of my interlocutors think that *izbjeglica* is a purely 'technical term' that has neither positive nor negative meanings attached to it. Unlike, for example, Greek refugees from Asia Minor who took pride in their refugee descent (Voutira 2003), or Hutu refugees in a refugee camp of Western Tanzania who valued their refugee status "as a sign of the ultimate temporariness of exile and refusal to become naturalized" (Malkki 1992: 35; also Malkki 1995), only several of my interlocutors stated that they are happy to be called *izbjeglice*. On the other side, there is a considerable number of those, especially members of older generations, who think that term *izbjeglica* carries

offensive and derogatory connotations, and they firmly reject being named as such. For some, the negative perception of the term 'refugee' comes from their very displacement experience, which, especially in its early stages, was comprehended as the most difficult and humiliating episode of their lives. Some of my interlocutors stressed that they were ashamed of their living conditions while occupying other people's houses or being accommodated in different refugee camps, especially having in mind the comfortable lives they lived prior to the displacement. The word *izbjeglica* reminds them of that period and makes them feel associated with someone who is homeless, poor and pitiful:

That word *izbjeglica* was a label... The locals could know, they could see [that I am a refugee]... It was a horrible experience when I wanted to go out with my friends and then somebody needed to walk me back to the refugee camp... It was a humiliating scene, that camp in darkness, that poverty of the place... [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Today, the success with which some Bijeljinan IDPs moved on with their lives, and certain social position they established for themselves and their families, make them feel detached from the term *izbjeglica* which used to arouse humiliating feelings as described above. This word is a reminder that there has been an undesired and unpleasant disruption in their lives which, for a considerable amount of time, kept them away from their pre-war social status and developed self-understanding. Unlike the meanings of the terms *izbjeglica* which were attributed to them abruptly and unwillingly, such 'moving on' with their lives, which has been accomplished with a lot of effort and sacrifice, makes them feel closer to the image they held of themselves prior to the war and the specific self-identification attached to it. In this view, the fact that they have been living in Bijeljina for more than 20 years, raising their children and grandchildren who are often born in this city, and successfully running different businesses, leaves no space for labelling based on their former displacement experience. Their properties, businesses, and the decades-long social presence in the local community should be sufficient reasons for letting the label go:

The only thing that offends me... well, not offends, but humiliates, is that word *izbjeglice*... The only thing I wish for, is to get rid of that word... Or when they say *izbjegličko naselje* [refugee settlement]... [...] To me, it is such a discrimination, that I could almost call it a chauvinism... Don't seclude me [with that word], please... [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

What makes me angry and will always make me angry is that word *izbjeglica*... In Bijeljina, I have built a holiday home [*vikendica*], I have a parcel of land, and I have an apartment in the city... what kind of *izbjeglica* am I then? I don't want to accept that I am an *izbjeglica* and that's the end of the story. [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

In other instances, Bijeljinar IDPs' rejection of the term *izbjeglica* stems out from their relationship with the local population, and the meanings this term has obtained through that particular relationship. Especially in the early displacement period, even when they experienced an initially warm welcome, some IDPs in Bijeljina felt not only economically and socially disadvantaged, but also humiliated, and, in certain cases, mistreated by the locals. Although such relationship was by no means a rule, there were locals who perceived their co-ethnic IDPs as poor and wretched people, and took advantage of their misfortune. According to some testimonies, the locals used the IDPs for cheap labour, and many newcomers to Semberija, even those highly educated, needed to engage in a hard agricultural work in order to provide for their families. At the time, the term *izbjeglica* became a synonym for a day-labourer in Semberija's fields who not only gets insufficiently paid for his/her work, but becomes labelled as a lazy and lousy worker. Hence, having in mind these negative connotations associated with the term 'refugee', even when some of my interlocutors saw no problem in the term *izbjeglica* itself, they believed that it could trigger negative feelings in those cases when it is purposefully used to offend and humiliate:

For me, the word *izbjeglica* has a completely neutral meaning... And I will tell you why... I was living in the place where I was born for 12 years... I was living in Sarajevo for almost 12 years... I was living in Visoko for some 15-16 years... And here, in Bijeljina, I have lived for 21 years... It looks as if I have been an *izbjeglica* my entire life then! And it was *me* who decided to come here in Bijeljina, and stay here in Bijeljina... But, you know when I am bothered with that word? I am bothered when somebody uses it only to humiliate me, to disrespect me! [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Every time the word *izbjeglica* resurfaces, Bijeljinar IDPs are reminded of their devastating displacement experience for which, in their view, the local population has little or no understanding. Being named an *izbjeglica*, in some situations, implies the

local population's lack of acceptance of the displaced people in their city, and lack of compassion for IDPs' losses and predicament:

It's hard, it's hard when it comes to that word *izbjeglica*... We didn't leave our houses and we didn't come here out of joy... When somebody mentions that word to me, I usually say: 'Thank God that you didn't need to go through that experience'... [...] When they call me *izbjeglica*, I have a feeling like they think that we couldn't wait to leave our homes and come here, to settle here, or to steal jobs to someone... [...] [With that word] we still feel as second-class citizens, that's the saddest thing of all... [Zorana (49), 13 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Despite the fact that, through the campaign of ethnic engineering, the ethno-national elites used IDPs' resettlement as a powerful strategy for creating or solidifying ethnically pure territories (see Chapter 3 and 4), it does not seem that there has been an official policy of the Republika Srpska's or local Bijeljina authorities which would promote a positive image of the term *izbjeglica*, and, at the same time, the positive image of all those people this term has been attributed to. Analysing the case of the Asia Minor refugees in Greece, Voutira (2003) stressed that the term 'refugees' has been affirmed as positive due to specific circumstances in which the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey occurred, including the Greek state policy with regards to the displaced population. She mentions three factors which were decisive in this case: one, that the exchange of population was not perceived as a temporary phenomenon as Asia Minor Greeks were not able to return to their homes in Turkey; two, the investment in solving these refugees' integration problem was seen as in long-term interest of the Greek state, as the newcomers were not some dispossessed 'others', but members and citizens of the Greek nation; and three, the Greek political leadership at the time aimed at transforming the failure of Greek irredentist aspirations in the Asia Minor into a national state policy which would put the rehabilitation of Asia Minor refugees at its core, and see the successful end of this process as a "national struggle and victory" (Voutira 2003: 148). All these three factors could apply to the relationship between Bosnian Serb ethno-national political authorities (both entity and local) and Bijeljina IDPs, too. More concretely, although Bijeljina IDPs could return to their pre-war homes, they made a decision to permanently resettle in Bijeljina, and were even encouraged to do so – therefore, their presence in Bijeljina was also not a temporary phenomenon. Moreover, Bijeljina IDPs shared the same ethnicity, language, culture

and citizenship with their co-ethnics in Bijeljina and Republika Srpska, and their permanent resettlement was certainly in a long-term interest for the leadership of the Serb-dominated entity of Republika Srpska. Finally, as the international community's insistence on ethnic cleansing reversal could be seen as a defeat for ethno-national elites' exclusionist goals, the resettlement of Serb IDPs and relative success of ethnic engineering campaigns despite such international pressure, could be seen as a victory which was won primarily thanks to Serb IDPs themselves, and their decision not to return.

The first post-war government of Bijeljina, and especially its mayor who was a member of the more moderate Democratic Party of Republika Srpska (DS RS), attempted to make a step toward reducing differences between the local and the displaced population, and the latter's smoother integration into the local Bijeljina society. In the issue of *Semblerske Novine* from February of 1998 (349/1998), the mayor of Bijeljina publically addressed the citizens with the words "my dear Semberija's people", explaining that he considers IDPs to be Semberija's people too, and that these people could not be called 'refugees' anymore, especially because majority of them decided to resettle in Bijeljina. In August of 1998, he stressed that one of the most important tasks of the local government should be to build mutual respect and trust between locals and IDPs (*Semblerske Novine* 360/1998). Nevertheless, the consequent governments of Bijeljina seemed to be preoccupied with these questions only during election campaigns, when they would call for reducing divisions between different population groups in Semberija, and would promise to put an end to the use of the word 'refugees' or 'refugee settlements'.³² With the exception of only several of my interlocutors, an overwhelming majority of them expressed an open bitterness and contempt for their former and current political representatives, complaining that, except for these empty promises and embellished proclamations during the election campaigns, the politicians have not done much for the IDPs community in Bijeljina (see Chapter 6). Although the local government offered certain incentives for those IDPs who wished to resettle (such as land parcels free of charge, building material for houses, tax exemption, and similar – see Chapters 3 and 4), many of my interlocutors felt that this was too little compared to what they had lost due to the war, and what they needed at that point in time. It was also too selective, as some other categories – such as war

³² On this see: *Semblerske Novine* 400/2000; 505/2004; 654/2008; 658/2008; 667/2008.

veterans, war invalids and families of fallen soldiers, were both more privileged in the local society, and more positively presented in public discourse.

Therefore, although Bijeljinar IDPs were formally seen as a valuable asset in promoting and solidifying ethnically pure territories, these IDPs rather considered themselves to be a liability to everyone – from their relatives who hosted them after displacement and wider local population of Semberija, to their political representatives both in the Republika Srpska and in the local Bijeljinar society. The issues of the local Bijeljinar newspaper *Semblerske Novine* (*SIM Novine* during the war) from 1992 to 2012 give evidence of such claims, as the discourse surrounding the Serb IDPs in Semberija, especially during the first decade of their displacement, usually presupposed the themes of their disturbing confessions concerning experienced traumas and losses, the highly demanding issue of satisfying IDPs' housing needs, the poor socio-economic conditions they live in (especially in collective reception centres), their resistance to the eviction process, their frequent quarrels with Bosniak returnees, their involvement in smuggling and war profiteering, and similar. Although such discourse of local politicians, policymakers and journalists alike have changed over time and IDPs in Bijeljina are now presented in more favourable light³³, all these themes from the early displacement period helped in the process of creating 'otherness' and attaching essentially negative connotations to the term *izbjeglica* (whether it invokes antagonism or simple pity towards those to whom this label refers), which, for some of my interlocutors, has certainly played a role in rejecting to be identified with this particular label. On the other side, for majority of my interlocutors, such negative connotations related to the label *izbjeglica* have stimulated the emergence of a distinct *izbjeglica* identity which, rather than being externally imposed, is mostly the product of Bijeljinar IDPs' self-identification process that affirms IDPs' agency and stresses those positive features and values associated with this particular group of people (see below).

³³ For example, at the commemorative event "Twenty years since the exodus of the Serbs from the region of Sarajevo" in 2016 (see below), the mayor of Bijeljina stated: "I am proud that, in some of the most difficult historical moments, Semberija became new *zavičaj* [homeland] to thousands of new citizens who went through the difficult displacement experience. In all that misery, which entire Republika Srpska has gone through –through a lesser or greater extent– Bijeljina was, to put it that way, *lucky* to enlarge its population size with tens of thousands new people, and to get good, honourable and diligent co-citizens. For 20 years already, together with the local population, they have been working on making Bijeljina and Semberija more prosperous." The whole ceremony available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdnqlRLFg3Q&t=881s>

The IDPs in Bijeljina who were only children when forced to leave their homes, are usually quite indifferent towards the term *izbjeglica*. Being an *izbjeglica* in one of the contexts described above is mostly an unknown feeling to the younger generations who have not experienced the forcible displacement in the same way their parents and grandparents have. In informal conversations among younger generations of IDPs, the term *izbjeglica* is often used as an inexhaustible source of jokes and mutual teasing. As described earlier, the older generations of Bijeljinan IDPs often perceive this term negatively, but they, nonetheless, largely use it in everyday discourse, as much as the locals do. They also believe that the local society in Bijeljina is not going to easily abandon the term *izbjeglica*, with all the complex connotations this word invokes. Frequently referring to the case of the German population who inhabited Semberija in the end of the nineteenth century and whose descendants in Bijeljina are still known as *kolonisti* [colonists], my interlocutors half-jokingly stated that if these people have not managed to get rid of the label *kolonisti* for one hundred and thirty years, then the IDPs can expect to have the label *izbjeglice* preserved for the following two hundreds, at least.

5.3. The sense of loss among *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina

Peter Loizos' study *The heart grown bitter* (1981) was conducted shortly after the Greek Cypriot refugees left their homes due to Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. It recorded these people's early displacement lives, serving as a testimony to what it means to suddenly become a refugee. As the emotional pain caused by the forcible displacement was still very fresh, these refugees' striking feelings of disruption and loss set the tone of their narratives recorded by the author. Some 30 years later, in another study conducted among these very same refugees, Loizos (2008) used the metaphor 'iron in the soul' to describe their distinct emotional condition after the long-term displacement experience. The displaced Greek Cypriots were not anymore disoriented and preoccupied with their material and other losses, and their negative displacement memories and mourning for the lost homes got covered by thick layers of everyday life. However, every time the topic of displacement was raised, it seemed as if the pain

resurfaced, too. Memories of their shattering displacement experience were like a splinter of iron trapped in these refugees' hearts and souls: the iron became an almost unnoticeable part of their being, but once pressed, it could cause significant pain.

My study concerning internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina was conducted some 20 to 24 years after they went through something which is considered to be one of the most abrupt, radical, and traumatic experiences in people's lives. What I have heard and observed in relation to Bijeljinan IDPs' feelings of loss, in many ways resembled the Loizos' metaphor of 'iron in the soul'. In everyday situations and informal conversations, Bijeljinan IDPs did not show signs of being preoccupied with the question of their former displacement experience, neither did they openly mourned for their forcibly interrupted pre-displacement lives. As discussed above, many of them even complained about the very term 'refugee' [*izbjeglica*] which, in their view, refers to their past displacement experience that they have in many ways transcended and overcome.

However, when the issues of war and forcible displacement were given more attention, and especially during the hours-long in-depth interviews, the attitudes of Bijeljinan IDPs would drastically change. Even when my interviewees, both male and female, and both older and younger generations, talked calmly about their displacement and post-displacement life journeys, every now and then they would pause their narration in order to admit that they are truly amazed by their ability to remain healthy and 'normal' after everything they have been through [*nakon svega što smo preživjeli, dobro smo mi ostali zdravi/normalni*]. Unlike Peter Loizos in his first study on the Argaki refugees (1981), I was not in a position to personally grasp my subjects' feelings and observe their actions in the early period of displacement, neither to conclude that some categories of displaced persons –as it was the case with the Argaki women– were particularly shaken by this event due to their traditionally stronger attachment to the pre-displacement households and local societies more broadly. Nevertheless, even with the time difference, my female interviewees were less capable than my male interviewees of hiding emotions of deep pain and distress while recalling certain wartime and post-war events. During our hours-long conversations, some of my female interviewees talked about their feelings of loss with trembling voice and teary eyes. Three female interviewees mentioned that they took a tranquilizer before our meeting, so that they could make sure that they would be capable of discussing such sensitive issues. Two women decided to cancel previously scheduled interviews because they

realized that they could not be reminded of their suffering and pain caused by the war. One of them lost a husband during the war, while the other has a father who is still considered missing as a consequence of the 1992-1995 conflict.

2.1.1. Loss of others and loss of selves

Three of my interviewees lost their close family members in the war, one of which was left without two older brothers who were killed in their early twenties. I have conducted in-depth interviews with four war invalids, one of which was wounded three times during the three-and-a-half year war. Five of my interlocutors have close family members who were severely injured, and one whose close family member was raped during the wartime. One male and two female interviewees suffered from illnesses which were direct outcome of their displacement experience, while two of them also believed that their close family members took their own lives due to humiliation and despair caused by experienced wartime traumas and stress. These are the stories of wartime and post-war losses that my visibly upset interlocutors avoided discussing in too many details. The IDPs' loss of the loved ones, their physical disabilities and impaired mental health, make an inseparable part of their post-displacement lives, and to a large extent affect these people's understanding of what it means to be an *izbjeglica* in Bijeljina.

The war and population displacement have made an impact on family, friendship and neighbourly relations. In her study on social inclusion of displaced persons in Bijeljina, and according to the sample of 150 respondents, Petrović (2007) found out that the number of close family members who lived in the same or in the nearest place to her respondents in Bijeljina, more than halved when compared to the pre-war period. In their immediate social surrounding, the number of close family members was four times smaller than before the war, and only 19 per cent of the respondents maintained daily contacts with these relatives. Six per cent of IDPs in Bijeljina did not have any contact with their family members, while 51 per cent stated that they do not receive neither financial nor emotional support from their close relatives.

Many of my interlocutors have also mourned for the lost social and kinship networks. This was particularly strong in the early displacement period, when the possibility of relying on family and friends usually meant the possibility of surviving in both economic and social sense. This feeling of loss of social and kinship networks was equally present among both male and female interlocutors. Bijeljina IDPs sadly talked about their relatives and pre-war neighbours who are dispersed throughout Bosnia and abroad, and whom they are not in position to see as often as they would love to. Seeing familiar faces from their pre-war local communities is one of the main reasons for Bijeljina IDPs' organizing in different associations of displaced persons, and it largely influences these organizations' annual activities (see below). Nenad (65) described the loss of pre-war family networks in this way:

So many families were broken up because of the war. Certain families got broken already in the wartime, when some family members escaped the violence and became internally displaced who knows where, while some other family members remained, went to some other place, or escaped abroad. So, we started losing those close links with our own family and relatives. Let's say there is one wider family from one and the same village, with 30 or so houses, where everybody knew everybody else – even the youngest of children knew the oldest member of that community... And then, out of sudden, that dispersion happened, so children of these people got born all over the world, from Australia to America, or, in Republika Srpska, from Novi Grad to Trebinje. So, we came to a very sad consequence [of that dispersion] that the children from the closest relatives are now 15, 20 or 30 years old, and they have never seen each other, neither do they know of each other. I know it's not an excuse, but in my case in particular, I couldn't... I didn't have [financial] resources to buy a car, to have money for the fuel and to go from Novi Travnik to Trebinje... I couldn't afford it, in fact, only few of us actually could... [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The relations within a single family unit also change due to the war and population displacement. As Colson (1971) noted regarding Gwembe Tonga people in Central Africa, kinship ideology and ties got reinforced in the initial period of displacement and people strived to keep conflicts at minimum, as they sought security in traditional relationships to overcome the initial difficulties. However, after several years of displacement, the old patterns in kinship relations re-emerged, as relatives quarrelled

and split up, especially due to the question of labour division which primarily affected father-son relationship. In Bijeljina, comparing the Serb displaced families with the families of Bosniak returnees to this city, Petrović (2007) found evidence of the more degraded family relations in the former group of respondents. IDPs in Bijeljina barely tolerated their family members in 13 per cent of the cases, while 15 per cent of them stated that they are having frequent quarrels and misunderstandings with their closest family members. As a comparison, only two per cent of respondents who belong to the group of Bosniak returnees gave one of these two statements. Among the three most important reasons for such state of affairs, Bijeljinar IDPs mentioned family finances (69 per cent), unemployment (47 per cent) and housing problems (46 per cent).

Similarly, my own interviewees believed that the traumatic war events and post-war struggle for survival have made a significant impact on interpersonal relationships within the displaced families in Bijeljina. Interestingly, it was mostly the male interviewees who found this topic more relevant. Given the traditional gender roles which consider a man to be the main family's protector and provider, husbands and fathers in the displaced households in Bijeljina have felt more pressured to secure their family's wellbeing, and in many cases found it harder to accept the negative post-war dynamics and deal with their family's predicament:

I've needed a lot of time to adjust... I have lived here for 13 years, but I needed 5 or 6 years for sure, to adjust. There has been a lot of anxiety, I've felt all my worries deep in my guts... I needed no one other to make me feel this way, it was just *me* who simply felt like I haven't adapted to these circumstances. Only in the past 2-3 years I have managed to change this feeling. There used to be nights with -20 degrees Celsius outside, when I used to wake up in the middle of the night, sweaty like the water itself, with sweat starting to freeze on my body... But now, now I've stabilized a bit. It's because I've provided enough for my children, I've also got my pension, wife is also fine, and I don't need to hurry anywhere anymore... There were periods in the past when I owed money [to other people]... You *must* provide for your family, but you simply can't find a way to do it... That's the worst feeling of all. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Another male interviewee, who is working as a psychologist in one of Bijeljina's local institutions, described the changed family relations among Bijeljinan IDPs in the following way:

Very often, people were disappointed and they experienced different traumas... And, although it sounds like cliché, I believe it is true – as long as there is money in the family, there is peace, too. When there is no money, when you do not have enough to give to your child to buy food for breakfast, when you cannot provide even for the most basic things for your child, when you cannot provide sugar, flour, coffee or whatever for your family, and when it is *you* who have to think about all these things, while others, at the same time, *expect* from you to do it – it's only normal that one day you simply explode [...] Then disagreements start, than fighting starts, and children suffer... There were far less such family disagreements immediately after the war, and far more in the early 2000s and onwards, because people were keeping these things to themselves and then they suddenly started to break... I am telling you this not only from my professional experience, but I also know many people who have gone through such experience in their own families. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Most of the above excerpts represent the testimonies of my older interviewees, i.e. those who had an established networks of friends and acquaintances, who were employed for some time and had successful careers, and/or those who had their own families formed when the war broke out. These Bijeljinan IDPs faced the loss of different roles they used to play in their pre-war local societies, through which they were self-identified and identified by others, thus also evaluated and valued as individuals:

The hardest thing for so many people was the fact that they left their homes in some mature years of their lives. To many people, *that* was the hardest thing. For example, when the war started, I was 42 – completely existentially secured, with apartment, salary, my wife's salary, children in kindergarten and school, family estate in the countryside (every weekend spending there, either to help our elderly with the estate, or to simply relax), and then suddenly you come to a situation where you don't have one *dinar*³⁴ in your pocket, finding yourself in an unknown environment where you have never been before, where you don't

³⁴ *Dinar* was the currency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and is the current currency in the Republic of Serbia. In everyday speech, the word *dinar* is used to denote money more generally. E.g. 'I do not have one dinar in my pocket' [*nemam ni dinara u džepu*], meaning – I do not have any money.

know anybody, or you know just a few of those 'brothers in suffering' [*sapatnici*] who also left their homes and unwillingly came here [in Bijeljina]. That was a huge stress for the people. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I have never got used to all this that happened to me. For 20 years, they [the local society] have been trying to bring me under their own norms of behaviour, but I believe that I came here too old for them to change me. I was 27 years old, I had my university finished, I had my life sorted out, and I was formed as a person. After all these 20 years, I haven't got used to the change [...] Apart from this, my mother was a Croat, my father was a Serb, and my husband was a Muslim. Being who I was in a small Bosnian town in the early 1990s and with three different nations in my own house, it was really difficult to move on. Everybody belonged somewhere, and I felt like I don't belong anywhere. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The latest testimony by 51-year old Jasna reveals one more important consequence of the war and population displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that is the sense of loss as experienced by children born in ethnically-mixed marriages, or those Bosnian and Herzegovinians who were in the mixed marriages themselves when the war broke out.³⁵ While in the former Yugoslavia ethnically-mixed marriages were highly encouraged as they promoted the idea of brotherhood and unity among different Yugoslav ethnic groups, in the wartime and post-war period, the existence of such social category became completely unacceptable. At the time when ethnic identification imposed itself as the dominant identifying marker in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, those who could not or did not want to identify with neither of the three major ethnic groups, have become politically and socially marginalized population groups. Struggling to find their place in the changed political and social reality in Bosnia, these people, as well as other categories mentioned above, have not only experienced loss of their pre-war houses, jobs, and their loved ones, but they have also, in many cases, lost their very pre-war selves.

³⁵ The highest rates of inter-marriages between different ethnic groups in Yugoslavia occurred in the places in which the populations were the most intermingled: the large cities, the province of Vojvodina in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the parts of Croatia inhabited by both Serbs and Croats. Of all six Yugoslav republics, Bosnia and Herzegovina had the highest percentage of children born in ethnically mixed marriages – 15.9 per cent. (Hayden 1996)

2.1.2. Loss of houses

For many families in pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those from rural areas, building a new house represented a life project. Bosnian and Herzegovinian men and women worked hard for years, sometimes even for decades, to secure for their families a modern place for living. In her study on the central Bosnian village of Dolina, Tone Bringa described what it meant for these people to tragically lose their houses during the armed conflict:

When they lose their house, they lose all they have worked for in the past and much of what they would have lived for in the future. Particularly for the man as husband and father, the house he managed to build symbolized his social worth; it was the proof of his hard work and commitment to his family and their future well-being. But the house or *kuća* also represented the moral unity of the household and the moral quality of its members, and while men were the builders of the house, women were the guardians of its moral values (Bringa 1995: 86).

In everyday interaction and informal conversations, Bijeljinar IDPs do not frequently speak of their pre-war houses and other material possessions, which especially stands true for those who have sold these properties, or exchanged them for an equivalent property in Bijeljina. However, this does not mean that the sense of loss is completely absent, or that there have not been those periods in their post-displacement lives when they visibly mourned for the houses and other properties which were left behind. During the interviews, when Bijeljinar IDPs were encouraged to talk about these issues in more details, the feeling of loss was particularly present among my older interviewees. Those who were only children when the forcible displacement occurred, usually empathized with their parents and grandparents, acknowledging that, from their current perspective, this must have been an extremely devastating experience.

All of my interviewees had the question of their housing solved before the war broke out. Some of them had their own house, while others lived in socially-owned apartments in their pre-war places of residence. Many of them possessed a family house in the countryside, alongside an apartment in the city. After forcible displacement and arrival to Bijeljina, many IDPs were temporarily settled in some old and shabby houses,

and they often replaced their comfortable city lives with difficult and demanding lives in the village. Degradation of their living standard was a shocking experience for some:

My mother really suffered during those days... Grandfather too, when he came to visit us, he literally got sick from what he had seen. The place, the culture, the behaviour of the villagers... [...] It was all completely different from our life before the war. We lived in an apartment with central heating, we had jobs and good salaries... and here, we didn't have a toilet in the house. The villagers were washing themselves in a barn, they had barns larger than their houses! [...] My mother was the one who suffered the most. Especially that washing in a barn. She used to warm up the water and bath my sister and me every night, with pigs and other animals around us – that was the biggest shock. My grandfather was displaced in Brčko and he came to see us, to see where we were. When he saw all this, he immediately got sick. He started crying, he couldn't hold himself. He said: 'Is *this* what I worked for my entire life? Dear God, how have we come down to this [*na šta smo spali*]?!' [Tijana (30), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

In their early displacement period when the armed conflict was still ongoing, Bijeljinar IDPs strongly hoped that their predicament is only temporary, and that it is only a matter of time before they go back to their homes in FBiH. Those whose houses and apartments in FBiH were not destroyed, sincerely believed in a prompt return, and were therefore able to alleviate their feelings of resentment and grief. Those whose properties got demolished or destroyed, mourned more openly for their houses and other material possessions, but their sense of loss got suppressed by their everyday struggle for a bare survival. With men risking their lives in the army and many IDPs making every effort to provide basic living conditions for their families, mourning for what had been lost or left behind, seemed as an unnecessary distraction:

It was a difficult feeling. We came here with nothing, and we were not in position to buy anything new for ourselves. People were creating something their entire lives, and then somebody comes and burns their house which they had taken a credit to build. In our village, our entire property was burnt in a day, absolutely nothing was left... [...] People were working hard their entire lives for it, and then everything disappeared in a day. But, you know, nobody was crying because of all that. We kept saying to ourselves that we are lucky to be alive, and that our loved ones did not lose their lives... Some neighbours and

acquaintances did get killed, but nobody from our close family circle. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

The sense of loss concerning IDPs' houses and other material possessions seemed to be the most prominent when the DPA was signed in 1995, after which majority of Bijeljina IDPs made a decision not to return to their pre-war towns and villages. While up to that point there was a hope of return, with the DPA and IDPs' decision to permanently stay at the territory of Bijeljina municipality which was controlled and governed by their respective ethnic group (unlike the territories where their pre-war houses remained), there also came the awareness that lives in their pre-war houses and apartments were inevitably lost, while there was still no perspective of building their new houses in Bijeljina. In this period, majority of my interlocutors lived in Bosniak-owned houses, which was probably the most difficult and humiliating period of their post-displacement lives. Bijeljina IDPs felt extremely embarrassed occupying other people's houses, using their furniture and tools, and cultivating their land. My interlocutors described that they felt like intruders in the personal space of some unknown people, who, just like themselves, unwillingly left all of their hard-earned possessions. A man described his discomfort every time he wanted to turn on the lights in the house, as he knew that this very same plastic switch used to be touched by the owner of the house. That plastic switch was a little spot where the owner and the 'intruder' would symbolically meet, which produced the latter's feelings of extreme shame and uneasiness. Another interviewee was pleased to stress that his family "has not set foot in a Muslim house" after displacement, which was his way to stress how honourable his family has managed to remain by exempting itself from such 'intruder' role, in spite of the war and all the difficulties its members have faced.

As noticed in the case of the Greek Cypriot refugees in Cyprus (Loizos 1977; 1981), or among the Croat refugees from Kosovo (Duijzings 1996), this experience of occupying other people's houses was particularly painful for displaced women. As the Greek culture places women mostly *inside* the house, Loizos (1981: 177) stressed that, with these houses gone, refugee women felt dependent, vulnerable and exposed, just like "snails without shells". For Bosnians and Herzegovinians, as Bringa (1995: 87) noted, the house as a mere building represented the men's hard labour, while "the interior of the house was the expression of the women's moral worth. It told a visitor that the hostess is *vrijedna* (worthy, also meaning industrious) and *čista* (clean, but

meaning a woman who kept her house and its members clean and tidy).” Hence, while finding themselves in a house which reflected on some other woman’s industriousness and tidiness, my female interviewees could not relate to that unfamiliar physical space and, more importantly, they felt as if their social and moral worth could not be articulated and appreciated under such circumstances. That is why some displaced women in Bijeljina could not come to terms with the possibility of moving into Bosniak houses:

All I was doing, I was crying, because I needed to go into somebody else’s house. I was crying and crying, I was completely depressed [...]. I couldn’t even imagine to go into a Muslim house, this was something incomprehensible to me. No, I didn’t even give it a thought, I didn’t even want to think about it, I didn’t know what it even means living in somebody else’s house, no way! [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

It was shocking to me when people would say that I should go to somebody else’s house, I didn’t understand what these people were talking about. It wasn’t even the last thing on my mind. For me, that was an impossible mission. I was just waiting for someone to call and say that we can go back to our town – I didn’t care if my town was in ruins. I was ready to suffer a bit, yes, but then to return to my house. If it was demolished, let it be, but I would return anyway, just not to enter into somebody else’s house. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

I suddenly got ill, and we needed a better accommodation than our cousin’s *vikendica* [holiday house]. Some friends told us that they found for us an empty Muslim house, and that it is a done deal [...]. Before seeing the house, I was going to the hospital to get an injection, I could barely walk, when we met another cousin of mine – I think that God himself sent him to me! He asked me where am I going, and I just started crying... I had not cried before that moment in front of other people, I didn’t want to show my emotions, because I didn’t want for anybody to pity me. I didn’t cry because I was ill, but because we were going to check out that Muslim house... [...] My husband also didn’t want to say where we were going, he felt ashamed to do so. But another friend who was with us made a remark about the Muslim house, and I started sobbing, because how am I going to live in somebody else’s house? I was upset because he said it to our cousin, it was humiliating thing for me. Then my cousin said: ‘You are not

going to live in anybody else's house until I am alive', and he promised to give us his own empty apartment to help us for some time. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

In the early 2000s, property law implementation process allowed for Bosniak refugees and IDPs to return to their houses in Bijeljina, while Bijeljinar IDPs got the opportunity to file claims for their pre-war properties in FBiH (see Chapter 3). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Bosniak returnees could come into repossession of their properties faster than Bijeljinar IDPs, as houses, apartments and other dwellings in Semberija were spared from physical damage or destruction during the war. Difficulties by which some Bijeljinar IDPs reclaimed their houses in FBiH, and poor condition in which these houses were left by their Bosniak and Croat occupiers, have helped in the process of Bijeljinar IDPs' detachment from their pre-war places of residence (see Chapter 6). Some of my interviewees had a very stressful first comeback to their pre-war houses and apartments, and are still feeling emotional while recalling those moments. However, the prevailing feeling seems to be that these houses, even if they were kept intact, were not the same as the ones Bijeljinar IDPs unwillingly left, and they simply did not feel like homes any more. As discussed in Chapter 3, rather than being a mere physical place of particular size and value, house as a *home* is a moral destination which provides security, familiarity and freedom for those who occupy that place (Black 2002; Jansen and Löfving 2009; Malkki 1992; Žíla 2015). For majority of Bijeljinar IDPs, as it will be discussed in more details in Chapter 6, the 1992-1995 war transformed their beloved houses into simple structures with walls and roofs. This does not mean that Bijeljinar IDPs got over the loss of their homes as experienced and remembered before the armed conflict. If nothing, the fact that certain objects which Bijeljinar IDPs took with themselves the day they were forced to leave everything behind –from blankets and souvenirs from family trips, to golden cups and religious icons– are being cherished to this day as the most precious family treasure, serve as a proof that their pre-war houses are not going to be easily forgotten. More importantly, as Parkin (1999: 313) argues, these material objects serve another purpose too: they “provide the material markers of templates, inscribed with narrative and sentiment, which may later re-articulate the shifting boundaries of a socio-cultural identity.”

More than 20 years after forcible displacement, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors possesses their new houses or apartments at the territory of Bijeljinar

municipality. As Bijeljina IDPs chose to become re-settlers instead returnees –thus giving up on rebuilding their old houses and apartments in their places of origin, or giving up to live there regardless of their properties’ physical condition– they could truly obtain the re-settler status and move on with their lives only after securing their own living space in Semberija. Securing new living space for their families after difficult post-displacement period has been considered a great victory, a moment after which they could say they are being ‘on their own’ again. Hence, entering their newly-built houses in Bijeljina symbolized the establishment of tighter bonds with their post-war places of residence and, for many of them, the weakening of ties with their pre-war homes in FBiH. More importantly, every time I found myself in the houses of Bijeljina IDPs, my hosts would gladly talk about the money, time, and energy invested in building their new living space from scratch, expressing an apparent satisfaction for feeling valuable and secure again. The IDPs’ new houses in Bijeljina seemed to be their new source of pride, or, to put it in the context of the excerpt from the Bringa’s (1995) study from the beginning of this section – their symbol of social worth, moral unity, and commitment to the family. This especially stands true for my male interviewees, who gladly described in greatest details how process of building their new houses unfolded, and how they could not truly count on anybody but themselves and their ‘bare hands’ in bringing this important project to its end. Therefore, not only that these new houses made them more connected to their new place of residence, but they also helped in regaining certain aspects of their self-identity which they felt to be abruptly and unwillingly taken from them due to the war and forcible displacement. The importance of the act of entering their newly-built houses and symbolism this act carries, shows that struggles of Bijeljina IDPs have not been less real and their losses less painful because they willingly opted for resettlement over return. The decision to remain at the territory of Bijeljina municipality was their own, but they needed 10 to 15 years of humiliation, uncertainty and hard work to start feeling ‘on their own’.

2.1.3. Loss of homelands

The feeling of loss of *zavičaj* [homeland] is one of the most striking features of Bijeljina IDPs, which has managed to remain present decades after forcible displacement. In the

narratives of Bijeljina IDPs, 'homelands' do not represent some abstract 'ancestral lands', but the immediate locale where they lived – the villages, towns and regions they left behind. My male and female interlocutors of both urban and rural origin very often spoke of their homelands –which they referred to as their *zavičaj* or *rodni kraj*– and recalled their first impressions after arriving to Bijeljina. For those who came from the countryside, Bijeljina seemed to be lacking natural resources and breath-taking landscapes, while for those who came from some of the largest cities in BiH, such as Sarajevo, Zenica or Tuzla, Bijeljina seemed to be too small and too backward:

I had never set a foot in Bijeljina before the war. I just knew that there was this town of Bijeljina somewhere, because my colleague from work had parents who lived there and she often talked about them. When my sister called me to come to Bijeljina and join her, I expected to see a proper town – not like Sarajevo, of course, but a proper small town. When I arrived to the bus station, my sister was waiting for me. She put me in a car and drove to her house in a part of the town called Gvozdevići. I didn't see anything around, because I was confused, and I was crying as I was too emotional after seeing my sister again [...]. But I noticed there was no a single residential building where we passed, so I asked my sister whether it is because she was staying in some suburb, far away from the centre. She said yes, we are a bit farther from the centre, but there are residential buildings in the town. After Sarajevo, it was natural that this was all shocking experience for me. The morning after that, I went for a walk to see where these buildings were, I wanted to see the town itself. When we arrived to the centre, I saw those several residential buildings, and said to my sister that I expected to see a bit larger town than this. But my sister got upset and told me: 'Why would you expect anything, why are you even comparing it to Sarajevo'? Well, I was not comparing it, to me there just wasn't a larger and prettier city than Sarajevo. I thought that I would never in my life move out from it. Simply, Sarajevo and I were one and the same, I was so connected to that town. I could go and visit other cities, some cities that people say that are the prettiest in the world, but I would never leave Sarajevo, and never go to live someplace else. But my sister told me: 'Don't think about it, don't look around! It is what it is [*to je, što je*], you will not stay here forever, we will return to our houses as soon as the war is over'. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Biljana's (61) testimony above reveals how important the emotional connection of Bijeljina IDPs was with their hometowns in FBiH. The interviewee mentioned that Sarajevo and she were "one and the same", and it was only understandable that neither Bijeljina, nor any other town "in the world", was good enough to replace such unique relationship. Although Bijeljina was the eighth largest municipality out of 109 municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Population census 1991), its size, beauty and "number of residential buildings" were not the things which bothered my interviewees the most, but the fact that they were forced to leave the places they loved and felt connected to. Even when their pre-war towns were not larger, neither more urban than Bijeljina, my interlocutors would mention that Bijeljina looked ugly and underdeveloped, and that nothing in this town could compare with what they had left behind. It is this subjective, emotion-laden component, therefore, that played the major role in IDPs' dissatisfaction with what awaited for them in Bijeljina. Bijeljina was not just like any other town, but the town of their exile and suffering. On the other side, their towns and villages of origin were the places where most of them were born, where they worked and lived through some of the most memorable moments of their lives, but which were, at the same time, suddenly taken away from them. As one of my interviewees explained:

I left all mine because I had to, I was forced to. I didn't leave it because I wanted to. If I came to Bijeljina because I wanted to, the town would have probably been much prettier to me than it actually seemed. I mean, Bijeljina is not ugly, and I would have looked differently at it if I came here willingly; I would have probably had a different impression. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

After more than two decades since their arrival to Bijeljina, my interlocutors have overcome these negative first impressions, and many of them have learnt to love the region which hosted their families after the devastating experience of forcible displacement. However, even during the informal conversations, they would very often stress how Bijeljina, and Semberija more widely, could never be on par with their *zavičaj* when it comes to the beauty of the place, and the lifestyle of the people who inhabit it (see Chapter 7). As an overwhelming majority of Bijeljina IDPs came from the hilly and mountainous regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, their main objection in relation to the life in Semberija referred to its "endless plains", and a person's disorientation that comes

with them. My interlocutors would very often spoke of their inability to get used to such landscape, which for some of them has persisted until this day:

A lot of time had passed until I got used to Bijeljina. Bijeljina's flat landscape, what else. I would go somewhere, and I didn't know to return to my house – everything looked just the same, and I couldn't find orientation in space. I would ask some passers-by in the street if I was 'up there' [*gore*] or 'down here' [*dole*], and they would say to me that there is no 'up' and 'down' in Bijeljina, but only 'here' [*ovdje*] and 'there' [*tamo*]. In my hometown, we had mountains around us, and you were either going 'up' to somewhere or 'down' to somewhere. [...] I think that at least six months had passed until I got used to all that. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

We came to a diametrically opposite environment, in terms of its climate and relief. From mountainous regions and altitude of some thousands and more meters, to the altitude of 50 to 100 meters. From the hills, to the plain. Take only this as a fact, and you can see how hard it was for many people to get used to the life in this region, especially in the beginning. It was hard to get used to the climate, to get used to the relief, to get used to the fact that you cannot find orientation anywhere... Wherever you turn around, you lose yourself in one second – unlike our life in the mountains where there was always a landmark which helped you find orientation in space... [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In many instances, Bijeljinan IDPs' perception of their *zavičaj* was romanticized, and advantages of the life in mountainous regions exaggerated. My interviewees nostalgically longed for their homelands, but these were the homelands which have been kept in IDPs' memories of their pre-war lives. A great number of my interlocutors used every occasion to stress how everything was prettier in their *zavičaj* than it is now in Bijeljina:

There are some people –and this is nothing but the truth– who could not, and never will be able to, get used to this climate, these plains. I know people who are suffering from asthma only because the air here is humid, while before they were used to the fresh mountainous air. When I went to visit my *rodni kraj* first time after four years, I almost fainted when I got out from the car. I took a breath rashly, and felt dizzy that very same moment. That is the clean, fresh, and dry air, without humidity, full of different smells from nearby pine trees...

You just feel in your nostrils that beautiful smell of the cut wood. For these reasons, as I said, there are people who cannot get used to this place. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I didn't mind the climate here. I had lived in different places before displacement, and I was not bothered by it. But yeah, I wouldn't mind having one hill here, either [laughs]. Here, when the heat starts in the summer, everything is somehow dead, every single leaf is stale and without life. In my *rodni kraj*, we had rivers, and valleys, and rustling leaves, and clean air, and freshness everywhere. It's simply more beautiful than here. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I've kept my old *zavičaj* in my heart, but I love my new *zavičaj*, too. But still, I prefer hills, because you can see better and farther from these hills, than while being in the plain. I love forest. Semberija is just like one big swamp between the two rivers, Sava and Drina. The swamp with mosquitos, and I hate mosquitos. [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

When we moved here [to Bijeljina], there was no anymore that pollution, that beautiful pollution and smell of my Zenica that I was used to during my entire life... After we came here, I used to love when people burnt the coal in the winter to warm up the houses, because it reminded me of my *zavičaj*. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

When I lived there in my hills, I thought that the plain is something special, something way better. But only now I realize that the real treasure is clean air and water, and not this flat terrain. It might be flat, but it is not worth a lot. To me, at last, it is not. From this perspective, I would have never wished for a life in the plain. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

The excerpts above demonstrate that, like any other object of nostalgic feelings, Bijeljinan IDPs' pre-war lives have been remembered in a largely selective, embellished and idealized way, sometimes involving past wishes and visions of how certain things *shall* be, rather than what they *were* in reality. In other words, it is longing for a time in a lost past, for the "home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym 2007: 7). In my interlocutors' remembrance, their homelands are described almost as fairy-tale sites, with beautiful rivers, valleys, hills, greenery, "rustling leaves" in light breeze, with "clean,

fresh and dry air” which is “full of different smells from nearby pine trees”, and where even the air pollution is nothing less but “beautiful”. On the other side, Semberija is depicted as “the swamp with mosquitos” where the air is very humid and “every single leaf is stale and without life”. Exaggerations in describing both their pre-war homelands and their current place of residence serves the purpose to emphasize the scope of their losses, create a deeper contrast with the less satisfying lives that some of them have led after the displacement, or, in some instances, to prove their superiority in relation to the local population (see Chapter 7).

Bijeljinaran IDPs’ gender, educational level, urban-rural origin, political orientation, particular regions, towns and villages they left, and the time when their displacement occurred, do not make a significant impact on the intensity of their sense of loss and their nostalgic remembrance of the lost homelands. Leaving homes and leaving homelands has been a sad and traumatic event for all of my interlocutors, and, when it comes to the nostalgic remembrance of these losses, it does not matter whether these IDPs were forcibly expelled or they left out of fear for their lives, whether their houses and other properties were only partially damaged, burned to the ground or kept intact, or whether they got displaced during the armed conflict or after the conflict was over. IDPs from the wider region of Sarajevo who left their homes in February and March 1996 did so in an organized way, being able to carry some of their possessions with them, including, among other, the very doors and windows from their pre-war houses. These objects are now part of their newly-built houses in Bijeljina, but, as some of them admitted to me, “they looked way better on their old house”, which used to be “one of the most beautiful buildings in the neighbourhood”.

On the other side, age *does* play role in Bijeljinaran IDPs’ sense of loss and experienced nostalgia towards lost homelands in a sense that longing for lost *zavičaj* was the least present among my younger interlocutors. They spoke warmly about the places where they were born and which they mostly knew from the stories of their parents and grandparents. However, they strongly identified with Bijeljina and Semberija too, where they have spent most of their adult lives. One of my interviewees described how she took her two teenage daughters to see the town in FBiH where they were born and displaced from as young children, and that their comment after seeing the place was: “Thank God that the war broke out, so we didn’t need to stay and live here”. On the other side, nostalgia for the places which were left behind was certainly

the most prominent among the oldest of my interviewees. One of my interlocutors explained it in this way:

The strangest thing for us when we came here to Semberija, was the plain. We haven't seen one hill in Semberija, and there was no chance of getting used to it. Children, they accept these things more easily, and we, a bit older people, we need to follow our children somehow, we have no other choice. The oldest, however, they have suffered the most, and I am sure that the lifespan of many of them has shortened because of this suffering, because they still can't accept everything that has happened to them. My father-in-law who is born in 1934, he lives with us in Bijeljina. Every day he goes for a walk, and when he returns home he says: 'Dear God, why didn't you let me die in my *zavičaj* so I could stay on my land? I would have preferred to die younger on *my* land, than to walk every day on the foreign one'. He simply can't accept this life. [Zorana (49), 13 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Alongside the two of my interviewees who still do not have the question of their housing solved and are living in the former reception centres, the elderly IDPs in Bijeljina were the only ones who stated that they are willing to return to their pre-war places of residence, even if their houses were destroyed, and even if it is for dying there only.³⁶ Similarly to what Loizos (2008; 2009) discovered in the case of Greek Cypriot refugees in Cyprus, what is preventing older Bijeljinan IDPs from fulfilling this wish is the fact that the return would also mean separation from the rest of the family, as their children and grandchildren do not share the same visions for their own lives. The oldest of my interviewees would speak of their *zavičaj* with teary eyes, very often unable to explain the strong feelings of loss and longing which they have felt all these years since the forcible displacement. Other interviewees –as it will be discussed in more details in Chapter 6– in spite of feeling nostalgic for their homelands and, in some cases, dissatisfied with their current lives, have not considered returning to their pre-war homes ever since the war ended in 1995.

³⁶ This goes in line with the study on the demographic determinants of return of refugees and IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which found out that older persons have been significantly more likely to return to their pre-war homes than younger ones (Stefanovic and Loizides 2017).

5.4. Associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina

Based on what has been discussed in this chapter so far, it could be said that IDPs in Bijeljina have gone through several different phases in their post-displacement lives. First phase refers to the wartime period in which majority of today's IDPs in Bijeljina – except for those who were displaced from Sarajevan municipalities after the war ended– hoped for return to their homes as soon as the war is over. The predicament of Bijeljinan IDPs was severe and mourning for the lost homes strong, but they managed to overcome this difficult period due to their preoccupation with everyday economic survival, and their unceasing hope for a quick return. The second phase starts with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in November 1995, after which a large majority of Bijeljinan IDPs decided not to return to their pre-war homes, as they found it unacceptable that their places of origin, in accordance with the provisions of the DPA, came under the political, socio-economic and cultural jurisdiction of the Bosniak and Croat authorities (see Chapter 6). For the Serbs from several Sarajevan municipalities, it was the DPA, and not the armed conflict itself, that became the reason for their displacement to Bijeljina in the early 1996. This phase lasted until mid or late 2000s when the IDPs were able to build their own houses or buy their own apartments in Bijeljina, and for many of them it represented the most difficult period in their post-displacement lives. For a decade or so, Bijeljinan IDPs were struggling to build their new living space in Bijeljina, while, at the same time, they were going through an arduous process of reclaiming their properties in FBiH, and a humiliating period of their lives in Bosniak-owned houses and apartments. This was the period of painful realisation that the links with their pre-war homes were slowly diminishing, while the sense of belonging to their new places of residence was not yet sufficiently developed. The third phase which has lasted until this day, represents the period which starts with the displaced Serbs in Bijeljina entering their new houses and apartments. Their connection and identification with Bijeljina has become stronger, while their relationship with the pre-war homes in FBiH, as the section above demonstrated, has mostly remained manifested through romanticized and nostalgic remembering of what has been inevitably lost.

It is only in this latest phase of their post-displacement lives that the IDPs in Bijeljina have been able to invest their financial resources, energy, and time into

forming different associations of displaced persons in this city. It was in the last decade that they could, after solving their basic existential and housing problems, concentrate on promoting some less urgent, but surely very important issues, which concern the displaced Serb population in Bijeljina. As discussed in Chapter 4, the greatest number of displaced persons in Bijeljina arrived from the three largest municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica, as well as from the region of Bosanska Krajina, including the municipalities of Drvar, Krupa na Uni and Sanski Most. Having in mind the considerable size of these communities, the best organized, as well as the most active and influential associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, have been the ones representing the IDPs from these four regions.³⁷

Since March 2010, displaced Serbs from Ilijaš, alongside the IDPs from the wider region of Sarajevo, including Vogošća, Rajlovac, Visoko, Breza, Vareš, Ilidža and Kakanj, have been organized in the Citizens' Association 'The Friends of Ilijaš' [*Udruženje građana 'Prijatelji Ilijaša'*, hereafter UGPI]. Since June 2015, the Serbs who were displaced from the region of Tuzla have been organized in the Tuzla Citizens' Homeland Association [*Zavičajno udruženje Tuzlaka*, hereafter ZUT]. From 2009 until 2017, displaced Serbs from the wider region of Zenica were gathered in the Association of Refugees and Displaced Serbs from the Zenica region [*Udruženje izbjeglih i raseljenih Srba zeničke regije*, hereafter UIRSZR], while since February 2017, the UIRSZR has been brought under the umbrella of the Association of Refugees and Social Justice 'Justice' [*Udruženje izbjeglica i socijalne pravde 'Pravda'*, hereafter Pravda]. In September 2016, displaced Serbs in Bijeljina from the region of Bosanska Krajina, encompassing as many as 13 different municipalities within this region, founded their own association of displaced persons under the name the Association of Krajina's Citizens [*Udruženje Krajišnika*, hereafter UdK].

These associations, each in accordance with its capacities and years of its presence in the local Bijeljinan community, have been responsible for carrying out a wide range of different activities which are related to the displaced groups of people in Bijeljina. According to their official statutes, as well as interviews conducted with their presidents and other representatives and members, their primary objectives include:

³⁷ The association of IDPs from Tuzla estimates that there are 10,000 persons who have been displaced from the region of Tuzla and are now living in Bijeljina. The association of IDPs from Zenica uses the number of 5-8,000 people, while the associations from Ilijaš and Bosanska Krajina estimate that there are 5,000 persons in Bijeljina displaced from their respective town and municipalities.

disseminating information about IDPs' rights and obligations, supporting socially vulnerable categories of IDPs, organizing different socializing and commemorative gatherings, arranging annual visits to the religious and other sites in their pre-war places of residence, sponsoring different social events which promote the specific region's tradition and culture (sport events, music and dance, exhibitions, etc.), cooperating with other similar associations of displaced persons in the country and diaspora, communicating with the local, entity and state authorities, and similar.

While aforementioned types of activities have been shared by all the associations in question, these associations' primary interests and aims, as well as the chosen ways of accomplishing them, depend on the specific region they refer to, and the needs of the displaced group of people they represent. The widespread belief among all groups of displaced Serbs in Bijeljina is that the IDPs from Ilijaš and its neighbouring municipalities have been in a certain advantage when compared to the IDPs from some other regions. This is because they arrived to Bijeljina mostly in the early 1996, after the war was over, being able to transfer their possessions with themselves, as well as to sell their remaining properties for a high price in post-war years, given these properties' favourable geographic position surrounding the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. In addition, as it will be discussed in Chapter 7, they are seen by the local Bijeljina society as those groups of IDPs in this city which have managed to do well for themselves and their families, in terms of acquired financial resources, established social positions, and created social networks. Thus, not being in need to address some more urgent issues, the UGPI, which is the oldest IDPs' association in the region led by some of the most prominent citizens of Bijeljina, has been putting emphasis on gathering and socializing of its members and sympathizers, focusing on organizing different sport tournaments, art colonies, culinary competitions, and similar.

The ZUT is tightly connected to the Eparchy of Zvornik and Tuzla [*Eparhija zvorničko-tuzlanska*] in Bijeljina and it has strongly supported those activities which aim at preserving the region-specific religious and cultural heritage. They are also engaged in supporting the not-so-large community of Serb returnees to Tuzla and its surrounding towns and villages. The UdK has primarily been dedicated to fostering the specific customs and traditions from the region of Bosanska Krajina, as illustrated through their promotional photograph presented in Figure 5.4. (below). They are also the initiators of the cultural manifestation 'Customs in heart and soul' [*Običaji u srcu i*

duši] which aims to unite the participants from all Bijeljina associations of displaced persons. The municipalities in the region of Bosanska Krajina which are now part of the FBiH are some of the rare regions in the predominantly Bosniak and Croat entity which are having majority Serb (returnee) population (such as Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo where Serbs constitute 91.2 and 82.8 per cent of the total population respectively, and Glamoč, with 43.5 per cent) (Population census 2013). This is why the UdK has also been engaged in supporting the Serb returnees in this region, especially in the context of their property rights in the FBiH. The newly-formed *Pravda*, which is the successor of the UIRSZR, has been primarily committed to supporting socially vulnerable categories of IDPs, representing these categories before the relevant municipality, entity and state bodies, and securing the protection of their rights derived from their IDP status. Interestingly, although women attend in great numbers various commemorative events, and take trips to cemeteries and religious sanctuaries in their pre-war places of residence, organized by the associations of displaced persons (see below), the UdK is the only association of displaced persons in Bijeljina whose president is a woman, while all other associations are presided, and their main managing bodies almost exclusively dominated, by male representatives and members. Given the fact that some of these associations have been founded and led by some of the most prominent businessmen in Bijeljina –presumably due to their financial influence, reputation, and widespread social networks that could benefit displaced groups they represent– the absence of women in the associations’ managing bodies could be explained by patriarchal nature of Bijeljina society, and especially its business sector in which women have been largely underrepresented due to traditional understanding of gender and gender roles.

2.1.4. *Zavičaj* as a gathering point

One of the characteristics which these four associations of displaced persons have in common is their strong focus on preserving culture and tradition which are distinct for the particular regions these associations represent. Through various activities which promote this objective, the associations’ members and sympathizers are given the opportunity to keep the elements of their specific cultural identity present in the new places of residence, through which they can regain the sense of continuity with their

pre-war lives. Each of these associations is organizing an annual gathering of its members and sympathizers from Bijeljina and other neighbouring municipalities, whereby the accent is primarily on the participants' socializing through presentation of the region-specific music, dances, customs and food.

While the UIRSZR has recently quitted organizing 'The night of Zenica' [*Zeničko veče*], the other three associations have remained committed to this activity. Every year in autumn, the UGPI is organizing 'The night of Ilijaš' [*Ilijaško veče*], while in February each year the ZUT is organizing the 'Tuzla citizens' gathering' [*Druženje Tuzlaka*]. On the first Saturday in June the UdK is organizing the annual gathering of its members at 'The Krajina prelo'³⁸ [*Krajiško prelo*], alongside an additional event named 'Customs in heart and soul' which is open for participation of all the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, and is usually organized every year in November. In a similar manner, some groups of displaced persons in Bijeljina which do not have their associations are also engaged in promoting their own region's cultural heritage. These events are usually organized on a smaller scale, gathering the IDPs from a particular region who are now living in the same *izbjegličko naselje*, or other neighbourhoods within the Bijeljina municipality which are predominantly inhabited by the displaced population. Such is the well-known 'The night of Ozren' [*Ozrensko veče*] organized by the IDPs from the region of the Ozren mountain, who are now mainly dispersed throughout different neighbourhoods in Semberija's countryside (e.g. the villages of Trnjaci, Dazdarevo, Dvorovi and Patkovača).

During these events, the participants would meet and socialize over food and drinks, usually followed by cultural and artistic programme, reflecting on the traditional folk *a cappella* singing, dance, and poetry which are specific for the particular region the association in question represents. While *Krajišnici* and *Sarajlije* would get entertained by the traditional stringed instrument of *gusle*, the gatherings of *Ozrenci* would be accompanied by a plucked, fretted long-necked instrument of *šargije*. For some of these associations, such as for the UGPI, the emphasis is on gathering and socializing, which

³⁸ *Prelo* was a social custom of gathering of mostly female family members, neighbours and friends, and mostly in the rural areas. The gathered women would sew, knit, and bind the clothes or do some other jobs for themselves and other members of the gathered company, but it also had as its aim the socializing of both men and women with music, dance and chat, at the time when there was not much work to be done in the fields or around the house (such as in the wintertime and in the evening). Today, this word is mostly used to denote its latter meaning – socializing or gathering of people, but very often with an element of 'traditional' in it, i.e. followed by traditional folk music, dances, and similar.

makes their annual events increasingly deprived of the traditional cultural and artistic content. For some others, such as the UdK, the primary aim is to promote the remembrance of the region's customs and tradition, which, as the title of one of their annual events suggests, remain in their 'hearts and souls'. As it could be observed at some of these events or heard in conversations with the members of different IDPs' associations, the younger generations within displaced families in Bijeljina do not share their parents' and grandparents' enthusiasm when it comes to organizing and participating in these and similar events. This is why some of these associations' representatives stressed that a major task ahead is to attract younger generations to meet and socialize among themselves, as well as to become more aware of the rich cultural heritage of their specific *zavičaj* or *rodni kraj*. An exception are the young IDPs and children born in the displaced families from the region of the Ozren mountain, who have formed their folklore ensemble in the village of Trnjaci, promoting the music and dance which are characteristic for the region they or their parents originate from.

While in the abovementioned events the elements of IDPs' *zavičaj* were symbolically brought to their post-displacement places of residence, there are also certain annual events which are being organized in their very homelands in FBiH. Once a year, different groups of displaced persons in Bijeljina are paying visits to particular places in their pre-war homelands which used to be the symbolic gathering sites prior to the displacement, and are thus considered important for preservation of their pre-war identities. These are usually the Christian Orthodox churches or monasteries which have been abandoned in the homeland, but which have in the post-war years been collectively visited on their saint's official name day, either after these sanctuaries were reconstructed, or after the security conditions were met for en masse arrival of the Serb Orthodox believers to FBiH.

The pre-war religious sites, as well as the Christian Orthodox religion more broadly, seem to be of great importance for the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina. The three out of four of these associations have the pictures of their pre-war sanctuaries depicted in their official coats of arms (see Figures 5.1., 5.2. and 5.3.). The religious building embraced by a two-headed eagle in Figure 5.1. represents the Church of Holy Prophet Elijah [*Crkva Svetog proroka Ilije*] in Ilijaš which the members and sympathizers of the UGPI from Bijeljina visit every year on 2 August. Another monument depicted in this coat of arms, represents the memorial built in the complex

of the Monastery of Saint Petka [*Manastir Svete Petke*] in Bijeljina, which is dedicated to the fallen soldiers and civilian victims of the 1992-1995 war from the municipalities of Ilijaš, Vogošća and Rajlovac (see below). On the day which celebrates the Holy Prophet Elijah (Figure 5.2., top right), thousands of displaced Serbs from the region of Tuzla gather in the 122-year old Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord [*Crkva Vaznesenja Gospodnjeg*] in Požarnica, which was finally reconstructed in 2016, after being severely damaged during the war in 1994 (Figure 5.2., top left). The mass gathering in Požarnica is organized by the ZUT – the Bijeljina association of displaced persons from the region of Tuzla, which is presided by a priest, and is arranging its yearly activities in close cooperation with the Eparchy of Zvornik and Tuzla in Bijeljina. The coat of arms of the ZUT also consists of the picture of a couple wearing traditional folk costumes from the Tuzla region (Figure 5.2., bottom left), alongside a saline well which is a symbol of the city of Tuzla, well-known for its production of salt and its salt lake tourism (Figure 5.2., bottom right).



Figure 5.1: Coat of arms, the Citizens' Association 'The Friends of Ilijaš' (UGPI)



Figure 5.2: Coat of arms, the Tuzla Homeland Association (ZUT)

The UIRSZR used to organize annual visits to the Church of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin [*Crkva rođenja presvete Bogorodice*] in Zenica, with its characteristic green bell tower depicted in Figure 5.3. This tower is portrayed above the picture in the bottom which represents a medieval castle characteristic for the region of central Bosnia, and in

front of a photograph depicting the panorama of the city of Zenica. Every year on 28 August when the Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates the Dormition of the Mother of God [*Uspenje presvete Bogorodice* or *Velika Gospojina*], Bijeljina IDPs from the region of the Ozren mountain are paying visit to the Ozren Monastery [*Manastir Ozren*] dedicated to Saint Nicholas, joining thousands of believers from other regions in BiH and diaspora on a celebration which lasts for several days. My interviewee from the UdK stressed that this association does not organize any en masse visits to the particular religious sites in their *rodni kraj*. This is because there are as many as 13 different municipalities represented by this association, and it proved to be a difficult task to determine only one religious site which would become a gathering point for the displaced Serbs in Bijeljina originating from Bosanska Krajina.



Figure 5.3: Coat of arms, the Association of Refugees and Displaced Serbs from the Zenica region (UIRSZR)



Figure 5.4: Promotional photograph, the Association of Krajina Citizens (UdK)

Although these visits to IDPs' *zavičaj* have an obvious religious component and outlook, a large majority of my interlocutors has stressed that the primary aim of their participation in these events is to meet and socialize with their relatives and friends, who have been dispersed throughout the country and abroad, and are therefore not in a position to see each other as often as they would love to. The tradition of organizing the

large-scale gatherings in Požarnica, and especially in the Ozren Monastery, is dating back to the pre-war period, but since the end of the war, these events have become even more popular among the Serb IDPs, precisely because of this strong socializing function.

The gathering in the Ozren Monastery is a three-day celebration during the warm summer month, when many Serbs who live abroad pay seasonal visit to their *rodni kraj*. Many *Ozrenci*, both older and younger generations, decide to camp in the immediate proximity of the monastery, while others travel on a daily basis from nearby towns and villages in the Republika Srpska. The place is so crowded that sometimes hundreds of vehicles are stuck in kilometres-long column on their way to the large plateau in front of the Monastery. The celebration includes a wide range of activities, from attending liturgy in the Church of Saint Nicolas [*Crkva Svetog Nikole*], barbequing and outdoor sports, shopping of souvenirs at numerous street vendors, to dancing the traditional *kolo* dances, and listening to the traditional musical ensembles. The sound of *šargije* spreads from dozens different tents built for this occasion only, some of which can accommodate hundreds of people at once. The participants are warmly greeting each other, discussing about their lives prior to the displacement, and asking for information about those friends and acquaintances they have lost track of due to the war and population displacement. At gatherings like this, *Ozrenci* would learn who of their pre-war neighbours and friends has married or has become a grandparent, who has moved abroad or returned to their *zavičaj* for good, who has retired, or who has died. My interlocutors rarely acknowledged the fact that this event had something to do with religious customs and beliefs. For majority of them, the main purpose of this and other similar events is to have a good time while meeting relatives and friends, or, as some of my interlocutors simply put it – “to be among our own people” [*biti među svojim svijetom*].

2.1.5. Remembering the exodus

Another common feature of the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina concerns the way in which they foster the memories of the war and their very displacement experience, which these IDPs' associations usually refer to as 'the exodus' [*egzodus*]. The

way that the past is collectively remembered, as well as the events from the past which are chosen to be commemorated in the name of a particular group of people, have the power to provide a sense of sameness among these people, in spite of their differences in terms of class, gender and other characteristics (Gillis 1994). Memories act as a “social glue” that holds a particular group together, and “gives it a sense of a shared past and a common purpose” (Dragović-Soso 2010: 30), thus highlighting its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. Hirschon (1998 [1989]) specifically stressed the importance of shared memories and narratives of the past for cultural survival and identity preservation of Asia Minor refugees in the Athenian suburb of Kokkinia. In the case of Bijeljina IDPs, acquiring the memories of a particular displaced group, and therefore identifying with its collective past, has the power to create a sense of a common *izbjeglica* identity, with a strong reference to the region these IDPs in particular originate from.

Being the milestone event in the lives of Bijeljina IDPs, the *egzodus* caused by the 1992-1995 war has become the most important component of the IDPs’ associations’ understanding of who Bijeljina IDPs are in the context of the post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given the specifics of their displacement and the size of these communities of displaced persons in Bijeljina, the associations of IDPs from the regions of Sarajevo and Tuzla have been the most active in their efforts to articulate and solidify their respective group’s memories of the wartime and post-war events. These associations have been responsible for organizing different exhibitions, movie screenings, commemorative ceremonies, or for building monuments and sites in memory of fallen soldiers and civilian victims of the armed conflict, which serve as a means for providing the displaced people’s sense of a common *izbjeglica* identity.

As it is defined in Article 7 of its statute, one of the main objectives of the UGPI has been to organize the construction of a memorial in Bijeljina which would keep the memory of the wartime defence of Ilijaš, and commemorate the fallen soldiers and civilian victims from Ilijaš, Vogošća, Rajlovac, and other municipalities in the wider Sarajevo region. Construction of the large memorial with 1,257 engraved names began in 2012 inside the complex of the Monastery of Saint Petka [*Manastir Svete Petke*] in Bijeljina, and it has been supported by donations of the association’s members, sympathisers, different sister associations in country and diaspora, local and entity governments, as well as Bijeljina’s business community. This memorial has become

another gathering point for displaced Serbs from the region of Sarajevo who are now residing in Bijeljina. Several times a year, they organize commemorative gatherings and wreath-laying ceremonies to pay tribute to the relatives, friends and neighbours they have tragically lost during the armed conflict. While this memorial's connection, both physical and symbolic, with the Serbian Orthodox Church is obvious, in a conversation with a Bijeljina priest who is himself an IDP, I was told that the memorial was built inside the complex of the Monastery not so much because it needed to obtain a certain religious component too, but because it would be better protected in case of some future violent conflicts and deliberate monument destructions.

In presence of the president of the Republika Srpska, the mayor of Bijeljina, and the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in March 2016 the UGPI in Bijeljina organized a ceremony to commemorate 20-year anniversary of the displacement, entitled 'Twenty years since the exodus of the Serbs from the region of Sarajevo' [*Dvadeset godina od egzodusa Srba sa područja Sarajeva*]. The ceremony included cultural and artistic programme involving performances of different actors, poets, choirs and musicians, a short documentary movie screening, as well as an exhibition of around 40 photographs depicting scenes of the very *egzodus* as it occurred in 1996, which are now being permanently exhibited in the premises of the UGPI. The organizers and participants in this ceremony stressed that their aim was not to mourn for what has been lost, but to celebrate with dignity and pride the way in which around 100,000 Serb IDPs from Sarajevo have managed to move on with their lives, in spite of the devastating displacement experience.

As it could be noticed at the ceremony, as well as in the interviews and informal conversations with the UGPI's representatives and other *Sarajlije*, the *egzodus* occupies the central position in Sarajevan IDPs understanding of who they are, not only in the local Bijeljina society, but in the Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina more widely. The sentence which is often melancholically repeated by Sarajevan Serbs is "we managed to defend our homes during the war, but we, nevertheless, lost them when the peace came." While the immediate reason for their displacement which happened after the war ended concerned these people's fear for their lives and wellbeing under the rule of the former enemies (see Chapter 6), on a more abstract level the *egzodus* is also understood as their collective sacrifice for the interests of the Serb population of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its autonomous entity of Republika Srpska. In this view, by their

decision not to remain at the territory of the Bosniak and Croat-controlled FBiH, but to leave their homes and resettle in the majority Serb Republika Srpska, the Serbs from the wider Sarajevan region embarked on an arduous journey of suffering and self-sacrifice in order to secure the long-term peace and security, but also to consolidate the ideal of having the Serb-dominated territory within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although for Sarajevan IDPs –as one of the brochures concerning the aforementioned ceremony states– ‘the ideal took primacy over [their] victimhood’, they feel that they have not been given the recognition and support they deserve, either by the Serb political elites, or their fellow nationals in the Republika Srpska. As an excerpt from a diary of a published author Boško P. Bilal (2006) illustrates, this support was felt to be lacking at the very time when the mass displacement occurred in 1996, when Sarajevan Serbs felt betrayed and manipulated by their political representatives who agreed to cede their homeland to their wartime enemies:

In the war, we defended our homeland. When the peace came, then we lost it. With enormous number of victims we stopped 30 enemy's attacks. And after the war ended, only then we got defeated. Our honour was taken from us, we were deceived. Our homeland defended in the war was given as a gift to those due to whom we were bleeding, we were left wounded or killed. An unavoidable question arises: Did the people of Ilijaš defend themselves in a right or in a wrong way? Have we been rewarded or punished? If we got punished in peace, than it must be that we didn't defend ourselves correctly. Then it would have been better if we left our homes in 1992, alive, together with those who later on lost their lives, and if we all together went to a less dangerous region. Now many sons would be alive, many orphans would have their fathers who would take care of them, see them getting educated and getting married. (Bilal 2006: 18)

In some of his public appearances, the president of the UGPI stressed that displaced Serbs from the region of Sarajevo have been inadequately led and organized during the act of mass displacement, but more problematic was the lack of any comprehensive and systematic strategy for solving their housing and socio-economic needs *after* the very displacement. In other words, in spite of their sacrifice which benefited ethno-national elites in the Republika Srpska, displaced Serbs from the region of Sarajevo feel that they

have been largely forgotten and left on their own.³⁹ Hence, in absence of an adequate understanding for Sarajevan IDPs' sacrifice and predicament by the wider Serb community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sticking together [*držati se zajedno*] and getting stronger together, have been defined as the main purposes of the UGPI since its foundation in 2010. The excerpt from the opening speech at the founding assembly of the UGPI states:

When people are forced to leave the places which used to be their homes for centuries, what is it that keeps these people going, and encourages them to move on? Where do they draw energy for the future? Looking for an answer to these questions, we have taken look at the recent past, asking ourselves what is it that has kept us going during all these years of suffering, years in poverty, and years of awareness that today you might find yourself in one place, but you don't know where you will find yourself tomorrow. The answer is one and only – our unity [*zajedništvo*]. It's the same like in that story in the Bible about sticks and a bundle of sticks. One stick you can break easily, but there is no power strong enough to break the whole bundle. That is why we gathered here to found this association as a home and a safe haven for all those who think and do well, both for themselves and for the others. [We gathered here] to work and build [things] together in this new social environment, to raise our young generations so that they know who we are, what we are, and where did we come from. [...] How are we going to do all this? One surely cannot do anything on his own. Neither just a few of us can, but all together we can. That's why we should all become the members of this association and behave as such at any time and place. Wherever we are, we will stick together, and we shall know of each other [*da znamo jedni za druge*]⁴⁰ (Bodiroga 2013: 75-76).

While in the case of Sarajevan IDPs in Bijeljina, the *egzodus* is remembered through their sacrifice for the greater (national) good, the IDPs from Tuzla see their *egzodus* as a result of betrayal by their pre-war political leadership, and their Bosniak and Croat neighbours and friends. For Sarajevan IDPs, the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement were the main reason for leaving their homes, while for Serb IDPs from Tuzla, it was the event of 15 May 1992, known as the 'Tuzla Column' [*Tuzlanska kolona*].

³⁹ Radio-television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), Political talk-show 'Aspekt', 7 March 2016, av. at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn4SXIHzjY4>

⁴⁰ More broadly, the expression *da znamo jedni za druge* means to be aware of each other's problems, to help and support each other.

Tuzlanska kolona, which marked the beginning of the armed conflict in this city, was the attack of the Bosniak and Croat forces on a convoy of soldiers of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA) that was retreating from Tuzla as a result of the previously agreed peaceful withdrawal of the JNA troops from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attack on the JNA convoy which at the time consisted mostly of Serb and Yugoslav soldiers, left behind around 60 dead and more than 40 wounded. This event still remains controversial and differently commemorated by the former warring parties: while the city of Tuzla celebrates 15 May as the 'City Liberation Day', the Serb IDPs from Tuzla, majority of whom now reside in Bijeljina, mourn for their lost ones through organizing different commemorative services in their post-war places of residence, one of which takes place at the memorial ossuary at the Pučile cemetery in Bijeljina. Also, every year on 30 August, the IDPs from the villages of Smoluća, Potpeć and Tinja (wider region of Tuzla), helped by the Citizens' Association 'Smoluća' [*Udruženje građana 'Smoluća'*] and other IDPs' and veterans' local and regional organisations, mark the anniversary of the liberation of these three villages, and organize a commemorative service for 74 residents who were killed during the three-month siege in 1992.

For displaced Tuzla Serbs in Bijeljina, *Tuzlanska kolona* represents the event which has become an integral part of their *izbjeglica* identity. All of my interlocutors from Tuzla narrated their personal life stories with clear references to the events which took place *before Tuzlanska kolona*, and those which occurred *after Tuzlanska kolona*, whereby the latter ones correspond to their exodus from the wider region of Tuzla. As representatives of the ZUT in Bijeljina stressed, displaced Serbs from Tuzla feel betrayed by their former political authorities and fellow citizens, who, through this attack on the JNA convoy at the very beginning of the armed conflict in Bosnia, made them feel unwelcome and unsafe in their own city. In this view, the feeling of betrayal becomes even more justified bearing in mind that the local government in Tuzla, even in the most difficult wartime years, held the reputation of a moderate, non-nationalist political force which aimed at treating all the citizens equally, and respecting their human rights regardless of their ethnic background (see e.g. Armakolas 2011; 2016). The fact that many Serbs from Tuzla who are now displaced in Bijeljina also voted for this government, believing that the values they shared with their co-citizens in Tuzla would bring them security and allow them to remain in their homes, only adds insult to injury. Feeling that the suffering of Serb IDPs from Tuzla has not been adequately

acknowledged, and that the question of war crimes against Tuzla Serbs has not been sufficiently addressed, the ZUT in Bijeljina has recently engaged in a project of documenting the *egzodus* of Serbs from the region of Tuzla. The project under the working title "The exodus of Serbs from the region of Tuzla" [*Egzodus Srba sa tuzlanske regije*] includes a book publishing, screening a documentary movie, and organizing an exhibition and a scientific conference, and it is expected to be realized during 2019.

5.5. *Izbjeglica* as an identity

As it has been stated in Chapter 2, social identity is "a social category, a group of people designated by a label (or labels) that is commonly used either by the people designated, others, or both" (Fearon 1999: 13-14). Earlier in this chapter it has been said that instead of the category of 'internally displaced persons', the category of 'refugees' or *izbjeglice* has been widely used in the local Bijeljina society, both by Bijeljina IDPs, and all the other members of the local Bijeljina society. In spite of its widespread use, while many Bijeljina IDPs are indifferent towards this label, there is also a considerable number of those who see it in negative light and refuse to be associated with it. Negative connotations attached to the label *izbjeglica/izbjeglice* have mostly been perceived as such by Bijeljina IDPs themselves, who see in this label a reminder of their shattering displacement experience, of the loss of social roles they used to play before the violent disruption of their lives, and of the humiliating life conditions some of them used to live in. In some instances, Bijeljina IDPs negatively evaluate 'refugee' label due to perceived lack of acceptance and understanding by the wider local society in Bijeljina, as well as due to the local policymakers' missed opportunity to promote this term more positively in everyday public discourse.

In Chapter 2 it has been discussed that social identity implies a sense of *similarity* with other members of a specific group or social category, based on a real or perceived salient common features. In this context, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 19) define collective identity as "emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group" which involves "felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members". In the previous sections of this chapter, 1) the very act of forcible displacement, 2) the post-

war struggle for socio-economic survival caused by this displacement, as well as 3) the strong feelings of loss of certain components of their pre-war lives and aspects of their pre-war selves, are analysed with a specific purpose of presenting those common experiences which are, to a lesser or greater extent, shared by all displaced Serbs in Bijeljina. In other words, Bijeljina IDPs' shattering displacement experience, their material and other losses and the hardship they have undergone since, represent those "qualities of sameness" (Barnard and Spencer 2005) which generate a sense of belonging to a specific social group, and make an inseparable part of Bijeljina IDPs' collective understanding of who they are (and who they are not) in the local Bijeljina, and the wider Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. These are, in fact, 'the things that bind' the subjects of this study, as the title of this chapter states. At the same time, as similarities as the ones mentioned above represent social constructs that exist symbolically in the lives of group members (Cohen 2001), this bond is not based on some 'objective' assessment, but is a matter of *feeling* to be similar to those who share those important experiences, at least more similar than to those who have never learnt what it means to be forcibly displaced (i.e. local population in Bijeljina). What is more, these particular experiences have been singled out as important commonalities between Bijeljina IDPs because they are seen as positive features, something that creates positive group distinctiveness, unlike the label *izbjeglica*. Vigil and Abidi (2018: 57) stress that "identity, and its fluid process of transformation, is subject to interact with previously established labels. [...] [It] is a key piece in the adaptation and integration of a refugee, as it continuously strives against the previously established and attached label." Hence, such positively defined *izbjeglica* identity of Bijeljina IDPs stands in opposition to the *izbjeglica* label which usually does not see IDPs as subjects with agency and voice, but rather as objects who either require help or pose a threat to the members of the recipient society. Various activities of IDPs' associations on preserving their specific cultural heritage and playing the role of "mediators of memory" (Alpan 2012: 220) of their wartime and post-war experiences and losses, furthermore strengthens a sense of similarity among and within different displaced groups of Serbs who are now residing in Bijeljina.

2.1.6. Solidarity and unity of Bijeljina IDPs

According to my interlocutors, being an *izbjeglica* in Bijeljina from the aspect of perceived similarities among the people who have gone through the common displacement experience, presupposes their mutual feelings of compassion for each other's suffering and losses, and solidarity in their efforts to overcome all the displacement-induced difficulties in their lives. In addition, being an *izbjeglica* in Bijeljina also means not being adequately understood in their pain, neither properly supported in their predicament, by the local Bijeljina population. Similarly to Greek Cypriot refugees from Loizos' (1981: 127, 183) study who believed that "it takes a refugee to understand one", or Russian-speaking forced migrants and refugees from Pilkington's (1998: 167) study who stated that "we can tell each other at a distance" based on a specific kind of pain they all shared, during the interviews and numerous informal conversations, my interlocutors would speak of their wartime and post-war struggles, with special emphasis on the fact that these struggles could only be properly understood by those who have gone through the similar displacement experience. Whether they talked about their wartime traumas and losses, or post-war socio-economic deprivation, Bijeljina IDPs feel that the locals have not been able to relate to their pain and predicament as much as their fellow IDPs have:

The displacement was the hardest for those who have lost their loved ones in the war, whose bones are left there [in FBiH]. I have lost my brother, for example, and when I go to the church here [in Bijeljina], to light a candle for him, I am always wondering if somebody has visited his grave, if somebody has cleaned it up... We are far away, 400 kilometres we are far away from our *rodni kraj*. Can you even imagine how it is for those who go to visit cemeteries in their *rodni kraj*, where there are only Croats or Muslims living today? Or for those whose cemeteries have been desecrated? You cannot even begin to describe it to someone who hasn't experienced it. [Zorana (49), 13 December 2017, Bijeljina]

At some point, I started going to *nadnica*. We used to go to the centre [of the village], carrying a hoe with ourselves, maybe ten women or so. A [local] man would come on a tractor and would point his finger at us, picking up who can and who cannot work in the fields that day... I was a small, skinny woman, and he was probably thinking that I am not capable of hard work or something. It

hurt me so much, because it was obvious that he did not care if I had for a bread, if I had one *marka* [convertible mark] in my house. He just couldn't understand. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

When I finally found a job in my profession, it was very difficult for me to spend time with my [local] colleagues. They were insensitive towards my position. During the break, they would start talking how they are renovating their houses, changing floors and buying new curtains, while, at the same time, I was going through an eviction process [from a Bosniak house], and was about to live in the street. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

On the other side, since their very arrival to Bijeljina, IDPs have been largely oriented towards each other, which played an important role in creation of a distinct *izbjeglica* identity. In the early phase of their displacement, when there was a shortage of available living space in Bijeljina, there were many IDPs who shared the occupied Bosniak houses with several other displaced families. This unpleasant and difficult experience of living in overcrowded houses has been compensated by IDPs' mutual material and emotional assistance, which offered a much-needed feeling of security during the most stressful period of their lives. With men mostly fighting in the war, displaced women were particularly eager to share their living space with other IDPs, who were, due to the same displacement experience, capable of understanding their fears and concerns. Also, with predominantly Bosniak neighbourhoods being emptied out, and Serb IDPs occupying their houses and apartments, for a decade or so there existed entire city quarts in Bijeljina which were almost exclusively inhabited by the displaced population (see Chapter 4). The IDPs from different regions became the first (closest) neighbours and close friends, engaging in the same economic activities – such as going to *nadnica* together, or handling the joint businesses at *buvljak*, and for many of them these friendships and partnerships have lasted until this day. My younger interlocutors stressed that during this early displacement period, they rarely interacted with their local Bijeljinan peers, as the schools in these neighbourhoods were also overwhelmingly attended by the children coming from the displaced families.

After Bijeljinan IDPs needed to leave the temporarily occupied Bosniak houses, many relatives, neighbours and friends decided to buy a plot of land and build a new house in the same 'refugee settlement', thus strengthening the social ties which were created either in the pre-war period of their lives, or during the first decade of their

displacement in Bijeljina. Many of my interlocutors pointed out that the extremely expensive and time-consuming process of building their houses would have not been possible without the help of their relatives, neighbours and friends. As Colson (1971: 70) noted in relation to the Kariba resettlement project in Zambia, kinship ties become particularly important in the period immediately after the resettlement; “in times of disaster, people will intensify their interactions with kinsmen for purposes of both emotional and substantive support”. In Bijeljina too, this help included financial and emotional support, and especially the reciprocal free labour, which was both a utilitarian and a social event, that involved food, drinks, as well as entertainment with music and dance at the end of the working activity.⁴¹ The IDPs’ life in the same neighbourhoods, their shared economic activities, and mutual help and solidarity expressed throughout difficult post-displacement periods, have indisputably brought them closer together. In her study on social inclusion of IDPs in Bijeljina, Petrović (2007) found out that two thirds of her respondents tend to maintain friendly relationships only with those people who, just like themselves, have gone through the experience of forcible displacement. As identification is also something that is realized and negotiated through interaction with others and is a matter of relationship between internal self-definition and external ascription (Jenkins (2008 [1996])), Bijeljinan IDPs’ sense of a shared features which imply their distinct solidarity and unity, has also been externally imposed by the local population in Bijeljina. Aside from the IDPs’ perceived resourcefulness [*snalažljivost*] and capability [*sposobnost*] visible in their supposedly very successful handling of economic possibilities, the locals have given them the reputation of extremely united and well-connected population groups within the local Bijeljinan society. The local population in Bijeljina often stresses that *izbjeglice* tend to stick together [*držati se zajedno*] and take care of each other more than the locals do, which for some Bijeljinans has played the role of a divisional factor between the local and the displaced groups of Bijeljinan population (see chapters 6 and 7).

As much as these processes enabled the IDPs’ mutual connectedness and solidarity, and encouraged the solidification of a common *izbjeglica* identity, they have

⁴¹ Such kind of voluntary communal work is traditionally called *moba*. It includes the voluntary mass physical labour provided for building a house, work on the fields, or any other activity that a particular household has to do quickly, but it needs more workers than it can actually provide. Although the reciprocity is not specified, there is a strong moral obligation to help those who had once helped you. (Bringa 1995)

also made their integration into the Bijeljina society to some extent slower. This has primarily been evident in the countryside where IDPs have not only preferred to socialize among themselves, but have also been living in spatially segregated settlements within different Semberija's villages and hamlets. Given the specific configuration of terrain of the vast Semberija's plain, large surfaces of agricultural land situated outside the densely populated local settlements, have been given free of charge by the local government, or sold by the local Bijeljina population, to the displaced families in this city (see Chapter 4). In this way, although formally being part of a particular village or a hamlet, the newly-formed *izbjeglička naselja* have remained secluded from the rest of the local community, including the community's domicile population. The distinguishable adjective *novi-a-o* [new] in front of their names has been sending an instant message that these settlements are inhabited by formerly displaced population groups.

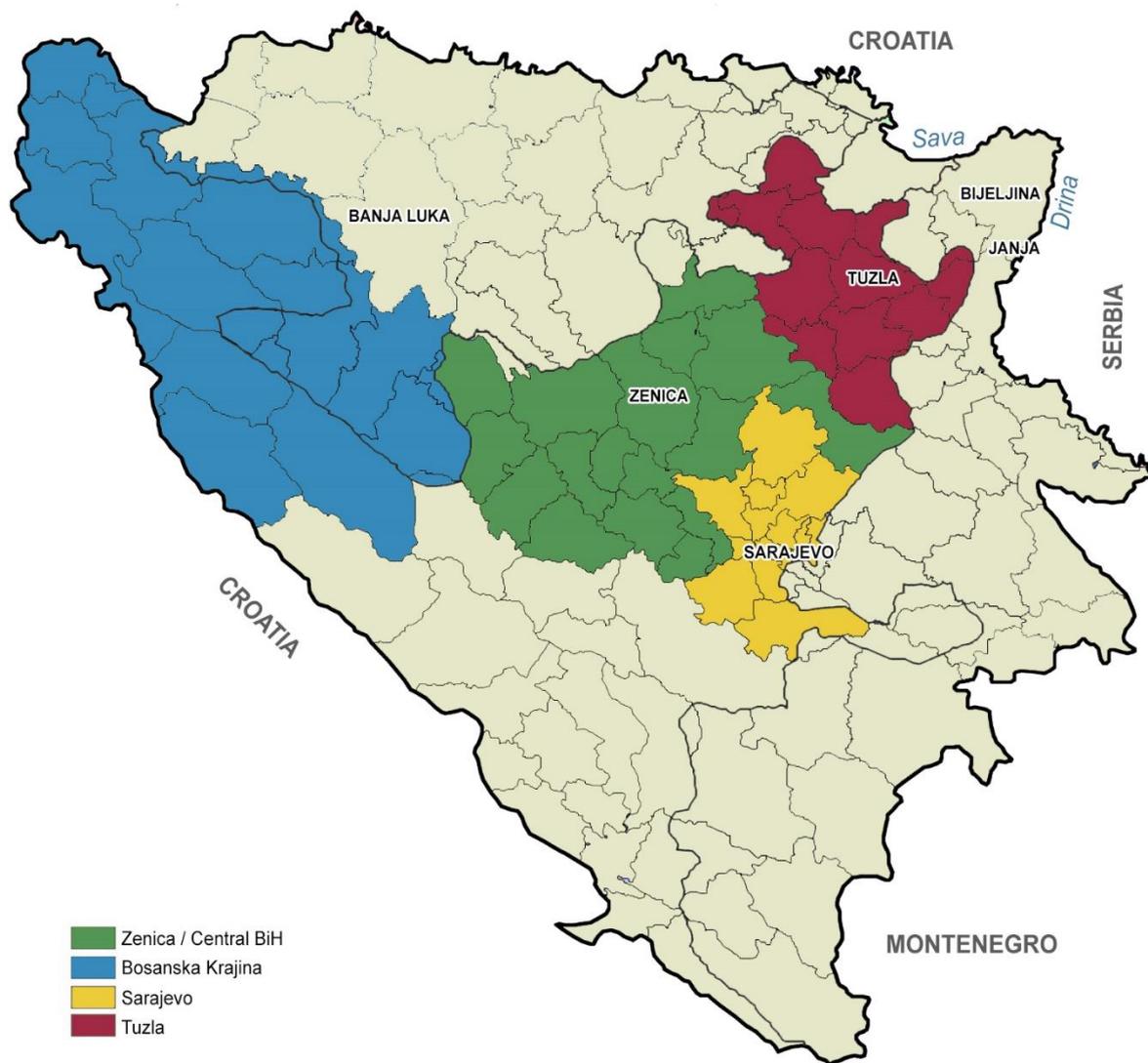
While in the long term, the spatial segregation has not represented a problem for younger generations' integration process, older generations of IDPs, and equally men and women, have mostly established only formal relationship with their co-villages who belong to the category of domicile population. Some of my interlocutors from rural areas, mostly pensioners, housewives and unemployed IDPs, stressed that they neither had the need nor desire to search for new social contacts outside their close circle of neighbours and friends. In Bijeljina's urban area, however, no such divisional processes have seem to be taken place. Despite the fact that the city proper also consists of the settlements built for the housing needs of the displaced groups of population, both locals and IDPs have been residing in this areas, and have additionally been oriented towards each other through their common working places, as well as the city-specific economic activities and established lifestyle.

2.1.7. Regional identities

Apart from a distinct *izbjeglica* identity based on IDPs' compassion for each other's suffering and losses, and solidarity in their post-displacement struggles, forcible displacement have also stimulated the growth of the new regional identities within the local Bijeljina society (see Figure 5.1.). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Bijeljina

IDPs, both older and younger generations, tend to strongly identify with their pre-war places and regions of residence. My interlocutors often stressed how feelings of compassion, solidarity and unity have been even stronger among those IDPs who share the same pre-war origins. In some instances, it is because the IDPs from the same region share the same wartime traumas, such as in the case of the villagers from Smoluća, Potpeć and Tinja, who have gone through the same distressing experience during the three-month siege in the summer of 1992. Similar example could be the IDPs from the wider Sarajevan region who collectively and simultaneously left their homes in the aftermath of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Figure 5.1: Geographical areas within Bosnia and Herzegovina (mostly FBiH), according to Bijeljina IDPs' developed sense of belonging to their respective regions of origin



Source: Author

In some other cases, it is the cultural element that plays the major role in fostering the specific regional identities. Although all *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina share the most important 'qualities of sameness' which stem out from their shattering displacement experience, those IDPs who originate from the same regions within Bosnia and Herzegovina are considered to be culturally closer and are thus favoured in social interaction. Such interaction with culturally similar 'other' connects Bijeljinar IDPs with their pre-war selves, and offers them feelings of stability and security:

I hope you won't get me wrong when I say it, but I am very happy that my son-in-law is *Ozrenac* [like myself]. You know why I say that I am happy? I have no constraints with his family and friends, because we truly know each other. [...] It's different with *Semberci* or *Sarajlije* or *Krajišnici* because I have an impression that they wouldn't understand me, that we wouldn't understand each other. [...] It's about different customs, different upbringing, and different way of life. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

Although regional identifications exist regardless of the activities of IDPs' associations in Bijeljina, bearing in mind that these associations have been founded in order to represent the IDPs from the same geographical regions, their activities have been stimulating for solidification of the distinct regional identities within the local Bijeljinar society. A particular association's main objectives have been determined by the needs of the displaced persons from the very region the association in question represents, and these IDPs' specific wartime and post-war displacement experiences. Each of the four major associations of displaced persons presented in this chapter has focused on preserving the culture and tradition which are region-specific, and has been fostering the memories of the war and forcible displacement with a strong reference to the particular, regionally defined group of people, in whose name these associations have been speaking and acting since their foundation. Through region-specific cultural and socializing events, commemorative anniversaries and rituals, and particular narratives of the past (especially remembering and narrating about the *egzodus*), displaced *Sarajlije*, *Tuzlaci*, *Zeničani* and *Krajišnici* in Bijeljina are each creating, articulating and negotiating their own shared memories in a way which reinforces their feeling of sameness, and generates a sense of belonging to their respective regional group.

However, taking into consideration the size of their membership, their financial capacities, and the specific time period in which they have been conducting their

activities, it is evident that not all IDPs' associations are equally successful and equally influential within the local community in Bijeljina. Three out of four of these associations were founded just a year or two before this research was conducted, and the UGPI – being founded in 2010– is the only association with a considerable experience in promoting region-specific culture and tradition through a wide range of different activities. Representatives of some of these associations complained that, despite their frequent appeals, they do not get neither financial help, nor any substantial kind of promotion or non-financial incentive, from the local or the RS entity authorities. Alongside the association which represents IDPs from the wider region of Tuzla (ZUT), the UGPI is the association with the largest membership base. However, while the ZUT is well-organized and well-connected with the powerful institution of the Eparchy of Zvornik and Tuzla in Bijeljina, being a young association (founded in 2015), it is yet to promote its image and establish its position in the local Bijeljina community. On the other side, the UGPI is not only the oldest IDPs' association in Bijeljina, but is also led and represented by some of the most prominent citizens of Bijeljina (including successful local businessmen), and well-connected to both political and church authorities in the local Bijeljina society and beyond.

Some of my interlocutors from the category of displaced population were of opinion that these associations, including the UGPI, have been used for satisfying personal interests of a narrow circle of people involved in these associations' activities and sponsorship (see Chapter 6). While it may be true that certain individuals or their businesses have indeed been promoted through the association's work, it seems that the reverse process has been even more apparent in a sense that the influence, wealth, and reputation of some of its members have benefited the association itself, while the activities of the UGPI, to a lesser or greater extent, have reflected positively on the entire regionally-defined group of people it has been representing. Among other, thanks to the activities of this very association, *Ilijašani* [people from Ilijaš], or *Sarajlije* more broadly, have established a reputation of a strongly united and coherent population group, with a dense network of social connections and tendency to stick together [*držati se zajedno*], or, as it is colloquially said, 'to keep each other's back' [*čuvaju leđa jedni drugima*]. Indeed, from what has been observed, there is a whole little world within Bijeljina which is dominated by this population group, from 'one of *our* women who holds that restaurant chain', 'that coffee shop where *our* people usually meet', 'that business

cooperation between *our* two companies’, ‘that manifestation we organized for *our* most talented people’, ‘the humanitarian action through which we aimed to support *our* people in need’, and similar. Indicative of this tight connection between *Sarajlije* in Bijeljina and a relatively closed social circle they created, is my conversation with a taxi driver who also originates from Sarajevo (more concretely, from Ilijaš), and who was familiar with my research, as we previously met in the premises of the UGPI. After he took interest in my topic and started talking about the ‘characteristics’ of the people from his *rodni kraj*, I asked him what does he think, how does that differ from the ‘characteristics’ of the people in Semberija? Despite the specific nature of his job which presupposes constant, everyday contact and communication with people, and despite the fact that he has been living and working in Bijeljina since 1996, his answer was quite surprising: “I wouldn’t really know, I don’t interact with *them* that much. Given all *our* people in this city, I don’t really need to.”

In spite of all this, during the interviews and informal conversations, representatives of the IDPs’ associations usually stressed that the activities of these associations, although extremely region-specific, do not aim at creating cleavages between the local and the displaced population, neither between different regional groups within the displaced population group in Bijeljina. Unlike the Asia Minor refugees in Greece (Hirschon 2014; Stelaku 2003)⁴², Bijeljina IDPs have *not* attempted to replicate their religious and cultural heritage in the new settlement sites, and the names of these sites do not recall these IDPs’ pre-war localities.⁴³ Thus, in contrast to numerous settlements of the Asia Minor refugees in Greece which have been named after their homeland names (their places of origin), prefixed by ‘nea’ for ‘new’ (i.e. Nea Smyrni, Nea Philadelphia), in Bijeljina, the prefix ‘new’ has usually been added to the existing name of the local settlement in question (i.e. Nova Janja, Novi Dvorovi). Some of my interlocutors pointed out that they refrained from building replicas of their pre-war

⁴² See also Colson (1971), who documented similar practices among Gwembe Tonga villagers in Zambia who got accustomed to a new environment and gave it a familiar imprint by using old neighbourhood names for new settlements.

⁴³ However, religious and cultural heritage of Bijeljina IDPs has been used commercially. For example, a newcomer from Sarajevo has built a very popular touristic site named the Ethno village “Stanišići”, situated just several kilometres away from the city of Bijeljina. The ethno village is a replica of the central Bosnian mountainous villages from the late 19th and 20th century. It consists of numerous wooden houses which have been transferred from their original sites (municipalities of Sarajevo, Olovo, Vareš, etc.). The central part of the ethno village is dominated by a large stone bridge that represents a replica of the Goat Bridge in Sarajevo, and the small train station Podlugovi, named after a village in the municipality of Ilijaš near Sarajevo.

religious sanctuaries in Semberija, because this could be understood as their intention to get secluded from the rest of Semberija's population. Also, as a symbolic gesture, in the memorial dedicated to fallen soldiers and civilian victims from Ilijaš, Vogošća and Rajlovac, the UGPI has also engraved the names of around 30 soldiers from Semberija who lost their lives at the front lines around Sarajevo. My interviewees from the UdK explained that they decided to organize the event 'Customs in heart and soul' which gathers the performers regardless of their region of origin, because they wanted to promote unity of all the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, as they are all representatives of the Serb people who share the same religion, culture, and tradition. Representatives from the UIRSZR underlined that they have been brought under the umbrella of the *Pravda* association in order to secure that voices of all socially vulnerable IDPs in Bijeljina, irrespective of their origins, are heard and taken into account.

However, the fact that, unlike Asia Minor refugees in Greece, Bijeljina IDPs have not aimed at replicating their religious and cultural heritage neither recalling their pre-war localities in their resettlement sites in Semberija, could also be explained through the specific moment in time and specific political and social circumstances in which both of these displacements occurred. While in many instances Greek refugees were building their resettlement sites from scratch in largely depopulated and underdeveloped parts of the country, Bijeljina IDPs got resettled within or in an immediate proximity of the existing, densely populated Semberija's settlements with well-developed institutions and infrastructure. Moreover, Bijeljina IDPs felt more culturally closer to the local population in Bijeljina, than Asia Minor Greeks to their co-ethnics in Greece (who sometimes did not even speak the same language), thus not being in need to hold onto the specific material manifestations of their cultural heritage within the new physical environment that, at least in the wider cultural and religious sense, largely resembled the places they left in FBiH. Finally, the finite character of the displacement of Asia Minor Greeks and the impossibility to return to their pre-displacement homes emphasized the role of memories of the past and the specific cultural and religious heritage in their self-identification process upon their displacement. On the other side, Bijeljina IDPs voluntarily decided to resettle and leave their pre-war homes behind, and were in position to visit those sites of importance for

their self-understanding whenever they felt like, sometimes even collectively, in organisation of their respective association of displaced persons in Bijeljina.

Regarding the relationship between different associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, as it could be noticed in interaction with their representatives and members, as well as through observation of the organized events and gatherings, it could hardly be said that there is any significant cooperation established between these associations. On the contrary, there is even a considerable level of rivalry, and even a certain degree of animosity, between different associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina. Some of these rivalries stem out from the competition for prestige in the local society, or over the local authorities' financial and other support. However, as it will be analysed in more details in Chapter 7, the rivalries and animosities are also founded in attributed regional stereotypes, which mostly predate the IDPs' forcible displacement experience, but have been renegotiated in the context of the post-war local society of Bijeljina.

This chapter addressed the question of what it means to be an internally displaced person in Bijeljina from the perspective of perceived similarities among the members of the displaced group of people, and it did so through giving voice to the IDPs in Bijeljina themselves. It focused on Bijeljinan IDPs' displacement experiences since their arrival to this city until today, reflecting on their socio-economic concerns and emotional struggles, as they emerged, got articulated, and in certain cases got overcome, in this particular local setting. It also described the main activities of the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, such as their efforts to preserve the elements of IDPs' pre-war identities, and to foster memories of the war and forcible displacement, which serve as a means for providing the displaced people's sense of a common 'refugee' [*izbjeglica*] identity. The chapter pointed out the 'qualities of sameness' which are, to a lesser or greater extent, shared by all IDPs in Bijeljina, and which have encouraged the creation of a common identity among the displaced group of people in this city. Apart from the very displacement experience, the sense of a common *izbjeglica* identity has been strengthened through their mutual feelings of compassion for each other's suffering and losses, and solidarity in their efforts to overcome all the displacement-induced difficulties in their lives. The activities of the associations of displaced persons

in Bijeljina have particularly been stimulating for the emergence of regional identities within the local Bijeljinan society, some of which existed even before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but have gotten renegotiated and readjusted since.

The following chapter will focus on the reasons behind Bijeljinan IDPs' decision not to return to their pre-war places of residence. It will look into the way in which the war, forcible displacement, and subsequent resettlement of Bijeljinan IDPs have influenced their sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group, and their relationship with the ethnic other.

6. Displacement and Ethnic Identity: Being a Displaced Serb in Bijeljina

6.1. Why not returning?

As described in Chapter 3, in the aftermath of the 1992-1995 armed conflict, the international actors involved in the return process in Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at restoring the country's pre-war multi-ethnic demographic composition in such a way that there were no clearly ethnically homogenous regions within the country's borders. In other words, it aimed at reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing employed by the former warring parties, through which one ethnic group attempted to systematically and forcefully remove the civilian population of another ethnic group from certain geographical areas. Restoring the country's ethnic heterogeneity was seen as a way of restoring a 'natural order' or 'normalcy' that were presumed to have existed prior to the war and forcible displacement of population, and as a political 'rightening the wrongs' of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Black 2001). In order to accomplish the ethnic cleansing reversal, the international community introduced and strongly supported the policy of so-called minority return, i.e. return of refugees and IDPs to the areas controlled by an ethnic group other than their own, where they would be in minority. Under such policy, the 'relocation' of refugees and IDPs, i.e. their permanent resettlement in ethnically majority areas, has been downplayed and firmly discouraged (Phuong 2000).

Chapters 4 and 5 presented the case of the Serb IDPs in Bijeljina who, contrary to the aforementioned policy of the international community, remained at the territory of their refuge in Republika Srpska, which has been dominated and controlled by their respective ethnic group. In spite of the given opportunity to return to their pre-war homes after the war ended, majority of Bijeljinar IDPs decided to sell or exchange their pre-war properties and resettle at the territory of Bijeljinar municipality. My interlocutors usually stressed that only those who did not have any other choice, in

other words – only those who, for various reasons, could not ‘make it’ in Bijeljina [*nisu se snašli*], have decided to return to their pre-war places of residence which are now mostly at the territory of predominantly Bosniak and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the exception of the two of my oldest interviewees, as well as the two IDPs who still have not solved their housing problem in Bijeljina, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors, both male and female, was extremely vocal in stressing the fact that ever since the end of the war in 1995, they have never considered returning to their pre-war homes.

My interlocutors also claimed that their decision to resettle in Bijeljina was their free choice and that they were not directly pressured or encouraged by anyone, including the Republika Srpska political authorities, led by the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). While free plots of land and building material which some of my interviewees received from the local Bijeljina authorities were of great help in their endeavours at the time (see Chapter 4), they were by no means the decisive reasons for IDPs’ decision to remain in Bijeljina. What is more, as it could be often heard from my interviewees, and my interlocutors more generally, not only that some kind of political pressure and a clear strategy for resettlement did not exist, but it was the IDPs themselves who needed to persuade the local authorities in Bijeljina to provide free plots of land at certain locations. As my interviewee and one of the most prominent residents of the ‘refugee neighbourhood’ of Nova Janja explained, the RS and the local Bijeljina political leadership had an *ad hoc* approach towards solving the IDPs’ housing problem, whereby some of the initial resettlement solutions they offered went against the wish of the IDPs themselves. Similar statement could be heard in the interview with the former high-ranked official in the municipality in Bijeljina who noted that the authorities did not know how to adequately handle the housing problem for such a large number of IDPs, as well as that the free plots of land could only be allocated in some rural and semi-rural areas of Semberija where the municipality owned sizable land surfaces (Personal interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina). Facing to get resettled in a dissatisfactory manner, the IDPs responded by getting more politically active, and by organizing different negotiating teams which advocated for more acceptable resettlement option before the relevant political authorities:

First they wanted to send us to Modriča [a town in RS], or some village near Modriča, because this region was pretty uninhabited. Then to the village of Hase [near Bijeljina]. And displaced people in Janja, we were all fighting in different brigades, we had already lost 60 people in the war.... Then we sat down together one night, we organized ourselves, and we said that we will still be protecting Semberija, we will be the first to protect it, but we also want to be taken better care of, resettlement-wise. We found a woman who donated her land to us in Janja. [...] The church authorities wanted us resettled in Brčko. But we told them: 'This people, our people, we won't be the immediate target [to the enemy] anymore... We want to be closer to the Drina River. [...] Hase is also not an option; the Drina River and the Sava River are not close enough. Give us Janja then.' When we got this land in Janja, it was a swamp, but little by little, with a lot of work, we made it look like a nice, organized neighbourhood. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

Majority of my interlocutors claimed that they have not received any help whatsoever. With the exception of only several of my interlocutors, an overwhelming majority of them even expressed a strong contempt for their political leadership at the time, complaining that, except for some empty promises and formal support expressed during the election campaigns, the politicians have not done much for the displaced Serbs in Bijeljina. As it was mentioned in Chapter 5, displaced Serbs from the region of Sarajevo complained about being inadequately led and organized during the act of mass displacement in 1996, and they criticized the Serb political leadership for failing to create and implement any comprehensive and systematic strategy for solving Sarajevan IDPs' housing and socio-economic needs after the very displacement. Bijeljinar IDPs expressed dissatisfaction with the very process of land allocation, which, in their view, was in favour of some other categories, such as war invalids and families of fallen soldiers. In some other instances, the free plots of land did not end up in the hands of IDPs in need, but of those individuals who had close family, business or political connections with the political authorities in Bijeljina and RS. *Semberske Novine* recorded numerous complaints and public protests of Bijeljinar IDPs against the RS and the local authorities, during which they expressed an open bitterness for not having their housing problem addressed as adequately and promptly as expected.⁴⁴ Some of my

⁴⁴ See e.g. *Semberske Novine* 360/1998; 403/2000; 405/2000; 408/2000; 422/2001; 425/2001; 430/2001; 447/2002; 463/2002.

interviewees not only believed that they did not receive the help they needed, but blamed the local authorities for trying to profit out of their misery:

I was at one *slava* together with the mayor of Bijeljina at the time. He did not know that there was an *izbjeglica* among all the *Semberci* at the table. It was at the time when all that euphoria about buying the plots of land from *Semberci* started... And I heard that mayor saying to other people at that *slava* about us, the *izbjeglice*: 'Guys, rip them off, they have a lot of money!' That's precisely what he said. And me... I borrowed money to come to Bijeljina, as I borrowed money to buy a small plot of land. Then I worked hard to give the money I owed back. And in my neighbourhood, the municipality authorities came only if there was something I need to pay to them, never the other way around. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I specifically asked those interviewees coming from the Sarajevan municipalities who were displaced in February 1996, whether some kind of political pressure for resettlement existed. During the war these municipalities were on the territory controlled by the Army of Republika Srpska, and they remained in Serbian hands until the DPA was signed (November 1995), when they became a part of the FBiH. It is a common opinion (see also Sell 1999) that the Bosnian Serb leadership at the time, as a part of their general policy of ethnic engineering (see Chapters 3 and 4), put an extreme pressure on around 100,000 Serbs from these municipalities to find refuge on the territory of Republika Srpska, thus solidifying its relative ethnic homogeneity which had been accomplished during the war. However, none of the interviewees agreed with this statement. Instead, they said that leaving their homes was the hardest decision in their lives, but they felt it was the only right choice. It is because they believed that they were incapable of sharing the same living space with those people they fought against and considered enemies for the four previous years. This region used to be the place where some of the fiercest clashes between the warring parties occurred, and the Serbs from these Sarajevan municipalities were fearing the revenge of the former enemies once they take the territory. Some of my interviewees explained their decision to leave Vogošća and Ilijaš near Sarajevo in this way:

I remember the news when the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. Everybody was celebrating the end of the war, and for us it was just devastating... Because that was the point when we lost everything we used to have before. We have

been sacrificed for a general peace. I remember it with melancholy, but now when I think about it – I have nothing to say against it. Because I remember very well the war, and all that shooting, and I would be ready to leave again, even this place here, just not to experience that violence all over again. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I was not afraid to stay and wait for that 23 February when they were supposed to take over the territory. I was thinking to stay, but I didn't see any logic in it. Because it's not really a pleasant feeling to sit and wait for somebody whom you had been watching over your gun for the past four years. Somebody you previously expelled from that very same territory. How could I expect from these people to arrive and start hugging me like nothing had happened? [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

There was no Serb propaganda for us to leave Vogošća, it was rather the propaganda of Muslims. Serbs were afraid, especially of those Mujahedin fighters who were slaughtering people during the war. And at the same time, the West was supporting it, supporting the Muslims in Bosnia. I used to listen to their media, and they were saying how the Serbs were raping women in Vogošća. That was a lie, a huge lie and propaganda, something unimaginable. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

My house in Visoko was burnt in the very beginning of the war. So I went into refugeehood in Ilijaš, I moved into a Croat house. I couldn't go to my house, and I was in somebody else's house, so, when this was the case, let me at least be in somebody else's house, but in the Republika Srpska. We have fought for four years, people were dying for that Republika Srpska, so how could we stay in the Federation then? We simply *had to* leave. There are even those people who spent entire war in their own houses, not even one window was missing. They too – they took what they had, their doors and windows and everything, and they left. We couldn't stay. There are people who stayed and they got killed, or got beaten... One old man who stayed, he went to the cemetery one day, in 1997, 1998 maybe, and they beat him so badly that he died seven days later. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The excerpts in this section show that Bijeljinan IDPs are not fully satisfied with the way their displacement problem has been addressed by the political authorities, so they

refuse to give them more credit for implementation of the resettlement idea. Although the formation of the 'refugee settlement' of Nova Janja could be read as local governments' deliberate attempt to prevent Janja from being re-established as overwhelmingly Bosniak village, my interlocutors insisted on IDPs' initiative and their crucial role in making this plan reality. Majority of my interlocutors claim that they received either very little support, or no support at all. Even those of my interviewees who received some kind of alternative accommodation which they have been using until this day, feel that the authorities who provided this accommodation for them do not deserve much praise. It is because these IDPs were obliged to buy out these properties if they wanted to keep the accommodation permanently, while their expectations went towards getting them free of charge, especially given their difficult socio-economic position and human and other losses their families experienced due to the war and forcible displacement.

Importantly, Bijeljina IDPs refuse to acknowledge a more significant role of their political leaders in the resettlement process –and, in addition, insist on the importance of their own engagement in solving this problem– because such acknowledgement would deny agency to the IDPs themselves. Denying them agency in this matter would mean denying their losses, sacrifices, experienced traumas and fears – all those factors which for many Bijeljina IDPs solidified their decision not to return even without any encouragement coming from their political representatives. Even though their resettlement decision complied with the policy of ethnic engineering implemented by their respective ethno-national authorities, or was in some cases strongly encouraged by it, it does not necessarily mean that Bijeljina IDPs have put this national rhetoric and collective interests above their personal wishes and concerns. Similarly to what Demetriou (2014a: 47; see also Demetriou 2018) discovered in the case of Cypriot refugees and their narratives of loss, “(b)etween the official and the private, the public and the intimate are discourses and practices that contradict nationalist rhetoric, take it for granted, debate it or render it irrelevant.” Such stances which are shared by an overwhelming majority of my interviewees, do not prove that a general policy of ethnic engineering in Bijeljina did not exist (see e.g. Human Rights Watch 2000; International Crisis Group 2002; Toal and Dahlman 2011), but that the displaced Serbs in Bijeljina either did not give it primacy over their personal interests and motives to resettle, or they were of an opinion that any kind of political

encouragement, under the specific circumstances of inter-ethnic conflict which triggered their displacement, was nothing but legitimate and justified.

If, according to this view, there was no political pressure, what are the reasons for Bijeljina IDPs' resettlement decision? The above statements of my interviewees originating from the wider region of Sarajevo reveal the two main reasons that majority of Bijeljina IDPs, regardless of their region of origin, mention when they explain why they decided not to return. One reason points to the concern for their safety at the territory controlled and inhabited by an enemy ethnic group, while the other refers to their belief that the restoration of a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina, where different ethnic and religious groups would again live peacefully side by side, is not only impossible given the recent armed conflict between these very same groups, but is also highly undesirable. As it will be further explored below, the return was undesirable option because of Bijeljina IDPs' understanding that their pre-war houses are not their 'homes' anymore, but also because of their strong identification with their respective ethnic group, which greatly influenced their sense of membership and 'belonging' during the war and in the post-war period.

6.1.1. 'That is not my home anymore'

As some studies on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina pointed out (Jansen 2006, 2007; Jansen and Löfving 2009; Stefansson 2004, 2006; Žila 2015), people's embodied attachment to particular place which is called 'home' should not be taken for granted, neither their unconditional desire to return to that place upon forcible displacement (see Chapter 3). War and experienced violence have the capacity to transform the meaning of 'home' for the displaced population, making these 'homes' the sites of their suffering, the reminders of their material and other losses, and the places where 'normal life' cannot be restored anymore. The concept of 'normal life' or 'normalcy' among displaced Bosnians and Herzegovinians does not only refer to the absence of safety, decent living standard, secure employment, free schooling, healthcare and similar, but also to the absence of *hope* that their lives could move forward in accordance to their particular needs and aspirations at the given moment in time (Jansen 2006, 2007, 2016; Jansen and Löfving

2009). Therefore, pre-war 'homes' became the places which belong to the *past*, but also the places which deprive displaced population of the *future* they imagined for themselves and their families.

For Bijeljina IDPs too, the 1992-1995 war and experienced violence seem to have led to irrevocable changes in their notion of belonging in both territorial and social terms. In other words, they have been feeling as if their 'homes' left behind have become different places, which are not any longer capable of offering the much-needed feelings of security, familiarity, freedom, and 'normalcy'. All these are the reasons why Bijeljina IDPs seem to have been less preoccupied with returning to their pre-war homes per se, and more concerned about 'finding a cool ground' (Allen 1996) for themselves and their families. They were interested in starting over the process of "making a place in the world" (Turton 2005), "where the possibilities of leading a normal life were deemed to be more realistic" (Stefansson 2004a: 182), and where they could start working on their future life projects. After all, as Al-Ali and Koser (2002: 6), note, "concepts of home are not static but dynamic processes, involving the acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving 'homes'".

A 61-year old Dragan, who has been displaced from Tuzla, narrated about the process of losing connection with his pre-war home in the following way:

Even today, when we go to Tuzla – it's safe to go there, nobody is mistreating you because the time has passed since the war, but still, I feel like that's not it [it's not what it used to be; *nije to to*]. There are no more *those* Muslims, *those* Serbs and *those* Croats, everything has changed, and their people also went to America, Canada... What do I want to say by this? It's something I've also experienced on my own skin... When I travel from Tuzla to Bijeljina over the top of the Majevica Mountain, here [towards Bijeljina, i.e. Republika Srpska] everything is prettier, the nature is more beautiful, and people are more beautiful. When I went to Tuzla with my children, some fourth or fifth time since the end of the war, they asked me: 'Dad, does your heart beat faster now when you are entering your Tuzla?' Well, children... You can lie to people, or let other people lie to you, but to lie to yourself, that's something I would never do. And for me, the truth is that I remember Tuzla up to that point when I was expelled into refugeehood. I grew up there, fell in love for the first time, got into the fight for the first time, got drunk for the first time, I had everything! And I loved it, I was having a good time. There was unity, I have to say that – there *was* unity. Or it was only tolerance

between different nations, I can't tell. [...] I remember Tuzla while it was *this* beautiful... After I was expelled, I would listen to the Radio Tuzla while I was spending time in the Majevisa Mountain, and I could hear how they call us [the Serbs] 'the bears from the Majevisa's woods'. [...] I listened to that, and I thought about my youth, about the best years of my life I spent there in Tuzla... And now I left Tuzla and I suddenly became some kind of aggressor, what aggressor?! And they would say [on the radio] how they freed some villages around Tuzla from the Serbs, well, how did you free them, when they have always been Serbian? But I have cried my heart out for that Tuzla of mine, and nothing attracts me there anymore. It's not the same anymore, there are no those Tuzla people, neither that kind of bond between the people. It's not my city anymore [*to više nije onaj moj grad*]. Buildings do not make a city, *people* do [*grad ne čine zgrade, već ljudi*]. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

This lengthy excerpt reveals several themes discerned in Bijeljinar IDPs' explanations of why their pre-war places of residence have ceased to be their 'homes' too. First, the 1992-1995 armed conflict represents a turning point for Bijeljinar IDPs, a landmark event after which, according to their own testimonies, just a few things in their lives have managed to remain the same. The war symbolizes an unpleasant disruption, a clear cut between pre-war and post-war periods of their lives. During the interviews, my interlocutors would frequently narrate their personal life stories with clear reference to the events which occurred *after the war*, and those which took place *before the war*. The life before the war was the life of inter-ethnic cooperation, unity and solidarity, as well as the period in which emotionally significant events –from finishing school, getting married, or buying an apartment, to “first loves”, “first fights” or “first drunken nights” (excerpt above)– had happened. In the excerpt above, the interviewee remembered his hometown and ‘home’ more broadly, only in relation to this town’s pre-war appearance and inhabitants, and linked the town’s beauty with his own noteworthy pre-war life events (“I remember Tuzla while it was *this* beautiful”). Hence, ‘home’ does not represent something which is attached only to the physical land where displaced people originate from, but also to their “memories of that place, the roots in that locality, the identity and security that both the time [...] and place had provided, which could not in that form be re-lived or re-created” (Flynn 2007: 472). In addition, due to their violent interruption, these past events, and pre-war lives more generally, have often been the objects of nostalgic feelings and embellished narratives,

as there is a painful realisation that they are no more and cannot return. To Bijeljina IDPs, all this creates the feeling that their pre-war 'homes' have remained 'stuck in the past', or, in other words, lost not only in spatial sense, but in temporal one, too.

Second, as much as the war has changed the lives of Bijeljina IDPs, it has also radically transformed the political, socio-economic and cultural fabric of their pre-war places of residence. In other words, Bijeljina IDPs' pre-war regions, towns, villages, and very neighbourhoods are objectively not anymore what they used to be before the armed conflict. Those who used to live in rural areas stated that the houses and complete infrastructure in their villages have been destroyed, and that these villages are now deserted places without any prospects for the future. Some other interviewees complained about the changed appearance of their towns, such as that they are now dominated by a large number of newly-built religious buildings belonging to other ethnic groups, which is, in their opinion, preventing them from identifying with these places, or, in certain cases, sending a clear message that they are not welcome there anymore. In his study on Greek Cypriot refugees in Cyprus, Loizos (1998: 71) noted how such cognitive and perceptual way of looking at pre-war places of residence was based on a past-present dichotomy, whereby the obvious mismatch between the past and the present outlook of these places created an impression that 'now' seems somehow "wrong" and "written over". It is similar to what a displaced person in Demetriou's study in Cyprus (2014a: 53) said: "You tend to idealize things, so for me even if I were given ten times the value of the house it would not be the same. I want my house back, I want my city back, I want my neighbourhood back, I want my smells back, I want to be able to run again on the beach, where I used to run as a child." In the case of Bijeljina IDPs, as the subjective perception of their home places before the war did not correspond to the objective look of their home places after the war, they tended to exaggerate the way they see their current places of residence ("here everything is prettier, the nature is more beautiful, and people are more beautiful", in the excerpt above), or downplay the way their pre-war homes look now ("roads became somehow narrower than they used to be before", "Sarajevo looks like Teheran", in the excerpts below):

I still have some properties in the FBiH, I do not have the heart to sell them [nemam srca da ih prodam]. Deep down, I am still hoping that I will return one day. I have some relatives there, so I am visiting from time to time, I have some

people to drink a coffee with. First time when I went there, there were no any inconveniencies, but it was really hard for me. I went to the cemetery, and all gravestones, all crosses were broken and vandalized... Everything has changed, like the roads too also became somehow narrower than they used to be before... The houses looked decrepit, some were demolished too – like those of my father and my brother, and of two of my cousins. [...] From 1996 until maybe 2010, Zenica got radicalized, a lot of Turkism, you could see and feel it. There were also many Mujahidin fighters there. Now – not so much. Now there are many more Mujahidin fighters in Sarajevo or around Maglaj, for example. As far as Zenica is concerned, you can walk through the city and not meet anyone you know. That pre-war *svijet* [people], it has disappeared. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

I used to go to Sarajevo after the war to reclaim my apartment. It was around the time when they started building all those mosques. When I saw so many mosques, it looked scary to me. Throughout the whole city, at every 100 or 200 meters, there were mosques. [...] Before the war I didn't mind the mosques, but now it was different. Sarajevo... That wasn't it any more [*to više nije to*]. They brought so much Islam in Sarajevo, I think in Sarajevo it's the most visible among all the cities in Bosnia. So much Islam, so that it looks like Teheran. I think it is a bit too much. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

We have never thought of returning, no... Really never, no way... I have no feelings towards that place anymore... For a long time, we haven't even gone to see it [our house], and then maybe some time in 1999, on our way to Sarajevo to pick up our visas for Germany, we stopped by our house [in Tuzla]. Nothing connects me to that house, nothing at all. Now that place is predominantly Muslim, and these are Muslim newcomers, mostly from Srebrenica. There is also too many new houses built in our neighbourhood. Before the war, there was this huge plot of land next to our house, and now it has been sold and many new houses built, mostly by Muslims, maybe some Croats too. My mom said to me: 'There is no way I would be courageous enough to sleep in this house of ours, not even for one night'. Later on, people who bought our house completely rearranged it. Recently, I went to Tuzla and I passed by my former house, and you know what? I could not even recognize it anymore. So now, there is no connection to that place, none whatsoever... [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Third, in all the excerpts presented above, my interlocutors mentioned how their pre-war places of residence do not feel like 'home' anymore due to their transformed demographic structure: "That pre-war *svijet* [people], it has disappeared", „Now that place is predominantly Muslim, and these are Muslim newcomers, mostly from Srebrenica", "There are no more *those* Muslims, *those* Serbs and *those* Croats, everything has changed". Perfectly summarized in my interviewee's statement above – "Buildings do not make a city, *people* do" – Bijeljina IDPs believed that they are incapable of re-connecting with their pre-war towns and villages if their pre-war relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as well as the specific pre-war bond between the people, are not part of these localities anymore. As 'home' represents "a living organism of relationships and traditions stretching back into the past" (Zetter 1998: 310), without Bijeljina IDPs' social world and social networks which existed prior to the war, there couldn't be that homely feeling either – the feeling which made them feel as being 'at home'. My interlocutors would very often mention that, due to demographic changes which have occurred in their home places since the war, they feel like "strangers in their own town", that have "nobody to drink coffee with". Coffee-drinking, especially among Bosnian and Herzegovinian women, represented the main type of social get-together, a kind of social necessity, and a symbol of close relationship, intimate communication, mutual hospitality and trust among neighbours and friends (see e.g. Bringa 1995; Helms 2010; Stefansson 2010). The war and forcible displacement have kept people from "drinking coffee together", disturbing in this way the harmonious social relations which this custom aimed to maintain prior to the war:

My former neighbour, a Muslim woman, has kept telling me how she doesn't have anybody there in Maglaj to drink coffee with [*nema se s kim kafa popiti*]. The town is full of newcomers, who came from who knows where, some refugees whose children went abroad and were sending them money, so they bought so many stuff. So *Maglajlije* [(native) people from Maglaj], my friends Muslims that I keep in touch with on a regular basis, they complain about it. As for us, we haven't thought of returning. When we went there, our apartment was demolished... I didn't care that it was demolished, because even if it wasn't, we wouldn't return. Everything is different. There are no more our former neighbours... Even those neighbours who stayed, they usually say they have nobody there to greet with a simple 'good morning'. The newcomers are some

people from the most remote villages, with a low culture... or, if I may say – with no culture at all. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

I am now a stranger in Sarajevo, in my own city. If I walk one of my usual routes through Sarajevo, I do not meet anyone I know. I have nobody to drink coffee with [*nemam s kim ni kafu popiti*]. There are no those people anymore. Neither Sarajevo has that soul it used to have before. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Finally, my interlocutors believed that the war and forcible displacement have altered the relationship between different Bosnian and Herzegovinian ethnic and religious groups. Although they wish they had someone “to drink coffee with”, they are well aware of the fact that, just like they and their very pre-war towns and villages have changed, many of their pre-war neighbours and friends have also gone through similar transformation process. Among these erstwhile neighbours and friends, there are those who, led by their own wartime traumas and losses, see Bijeljina IDPs as “aggressors”, “criminals”, or “bears from the Majevisa’s woods” (excerpts above). What is more, Sorabji (1995) explained that the aim of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina has not only been to forcibly remove the civilian population of the enemy ethnic or religious group from certain geographical areas, but also to prevent any future return of the expelled population. This has been accomplished through personal nature of violence, perpetrated between erstwhile neighbours, colleagues and friends, as well as through violence employed in physical spaces and settings which were all too well known to the victims. In this way, by transforming the pre-war neighbours, colleagues and friends into torturers and killers, and the familiar neighbourhoods and local buildings into places of suffering and slaughter, the 1992-1995 war has disturbed the relations of ‘good neighbourliness’ [*komšiluk*]⁴⁵ among Bosnians and Herzegovinians, which symbolized good relations in general, especially among the members of different ethno-religious groups (Bougarel 2004). Such personal violence and destroyed institution of *komšiluk* have served the purpose of “frightening people into leaving and frightening them into never wanting to return, even if their homes are still standing for

⁴⁵ The informal institution of ‘good neighbourliness’ or *komšiluk* in Bosnia and Herzegovina implies not only spatial connectedness of people who live in each other’s proximity, but deeper relations of trust, affection and exchange between the neighbours [*komšije*] who are a source of aid, protection and company to each other. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, *komšiluk* is an idiom of good relations in general, especially among the members of different ethno-religious groups (see e.g. Bougarel 2004; Bringa 1995; Helms 2010; Sorabji 1995).

them to return to” (Sorabji 1995: 92). Therefore, traumatic war experiences, fear for their safety, lost social networks, discrepancies between what their places of origin were before and what is left of them now, are some of the main reasons why Bijeljina IDPs feel discomfort while visiting their pre-war local societies, or do not wish to visit them at all. Even if this discomfort, this “weight on their shoulders”, is “in their heads” only (excerpt below), it prevents their pre-war towns and villages from being called ‘home’ anymore:

Who would return? My father still doesn’t want to go there and visit. He simply doesn’t like going there. He went once when we sold our house. It was partially destroyed, so we sold it for a low price. He has never thought of returning back there, so we didn’t apply for any donations to reconstruct that house. So, that one time he went there, he met people he used to know, and he simply felt bad [*jednostavno se osjećao loše*] because he realized that they changed, they looked strangely at him, although they were friends once. He probably got disappointed because of all that. We still have around 150 *dunums* of land there, from two different villages, because father’s family was really rich. We had forests too, maybe 20-30 *dunums*, but Muslims have cut them without our permission. [...] Nobody wants to return there. Sometimes I am thinking how much land we have down there, I could build a house, and, I don’t know... if I get sick of everything, I could go there and breed sheep, if I want. But there is no way I would ever do that. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I am often saying to my dad to go to Bugojno and regulate our property rights there, to reclaim what is ours. But no, he is not even thinking to go back there. Mother goes sometimes. Recently, she paid visit to our local church there, on the day which celebrates our patron saint. She also went to the cemetery where my two grandmothers and one grandfather were buried. Another grandmother of mine died here in Bijeljina two years ago. Mother is not afraid to go there, neither am I. But we feel uncomfortable [*osjećamo se neprijatno*]... I can’t say I am afraid, it’s more that I just feel bad there [*jednostavno se osjećam loše tamo*]. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

I don’t know how such a hatred suddenly got born in our neighbours and friends. During the war, when they would capture our soldiers, they would torture them and made them suffer, so many of them did not manage to survive. I can’t understand that. Like they got filled up with hatred overnight. They stopped

being those neighbours they used to be before the war. And still, today, they are not those neighbours they used to be before the war. Although, in our villages, there are no many of our old neighbours, anyway. Some new Muslims came, from Srebrenica and elsewhere. So, when you go there, it is just sadness and sorrow [*sve je tuga i jad*]. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

I don't have any intention to walk around and offend Muslims in Bijeljina, to demolish their monuments... I am not bothered by their mosques at all. It's not because I can't do anything about that, but I am simply not bothered by their presence here, not at all. I don't even think about it, I live my own life and mind my own business. But when I go to Tuzla, I don't feel comfortable [*ja se ne osjećam prijatno*]. And all Serbs from Tuzla will tell you the same. I am always subconsciously thinking if somebody is going to do me harm. I have an impression like it's written on my forehead that I am a Serb. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

When my wife went back to Tuzla for the first time, I asked her what was it like, what did she feel... She told me this: 'Up to the top of the Majevisa Mountain, it was fine, but on my way down [towards Tuzla], there was such a feeling of uncertainty, it was as if I was carrying fifty kilos of weight on both of my shoulders...' It's all in our heads, I believe [*to je sve u našim glavama, ja mislim*]. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

The aforementioned reasons for the changed perception of 'home' apply equally for both male and female IDPs in Bijeljina. While some studies on refugees and IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina found out that gender matters in refugees' and IDPs' *decision to return* to their pre-war homes insofar as younger women were very unlikely to return due to new socio-economic opportunities in urban areas where they got displaced (Stefanovic and Loizides 2017), in the case of Bijeljinan IDPs and their decision *not to return*, both men and women singled out the same arguments for not perceiving their places of origin as their 'homes' anymore. Moreover, the reasons for the changed perception of 'home' apply primarily to older generations of Bijeljinan IDPs, who, as Loizos (2009: 65-66) explained in the case of Greek Cypriot refugees in Cyprus, had a longer "experiential time" (the amount of time they spent in their pre-war community where all kinds of social, emotional and economic local commitments had been made), which has the ability to greatly influence individual perceptions of the desirability of return. Many of my younger

interlocutors also associated themselves with *izbjeglica* identity even though, in some cases, they were born after their family got displaced in Bijeljina. Some others, like a teenage boy whom I asked to comment on a t-shirt he was wearing with ‘I am 100 % *Ozrenac*’ inscription, admitted being identified with their pre-war towns and regions only in order to please their parents, and in this way show certain respect for all the suffering the elderly displaced persons have gone through. However, although they empathized with their parents and grandparents, acknowledging how deeply these IDPs with longer “experiential time” have been affected by displacement, none of my interlocutors from the younger category of Bijeljinan IDPs expressed any willingness to return. For my younger interviewees who were only children at the time of their forcible displacement, and who in the meantime have matured and made their livelihoods in Bijeljina, their post-displacement accomplishments and established social relations carry much more meaning and significance than the (unknown) places which were left behind. Here is how 36-year old Boris and 30-year old Bojana explained this lack of connection with their pre-war homes:

We didn’t really have a lot of choice. My parents could not stay in Bijeljina because they didn’t have that kind of economic, I mean financial strength, to build the house... So they took what they could, that aid for reconstructing our burnt house [in FBiH]. Not even for one moment I considered returning there myself. I came to Bijeljina when I was 11 years old, and I have been formed as a person here in this society, you understand? All my friends are here, family, I have grown up here, while my parents, they have been formed on that other side. My father did not make it in Bijeljina [*nije se snašao*], so he and my mother left, and my brother and me... we stayed. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I was really young when I left my place of birth [*rodno mjesto*]. I was only 6 years old. [...] I don’t really remember my house. When I want to revoke the memories of my house, I remember that house in Janjari [a village near Bijeljina], where we lived after displacement. I remember what my house looked like from the outside, but not really what its interior looked like. I have been maybe once there in my village since the end of the war. It felt as if I was in Afghanistan, for example. The same thing – no feeling at all. [...] The question of return has never been raised in my family, and even if it was, I would have never returned. My parents neither. [...] Although, when my father goes sometimes to his *rodni kraj*, he comes back so delighted. So I ask him: ‘Why haven’t you returned then?’

Because obviously something attracts him there. But no, he has been used to Bijeljina too, he wouldn't been able to make it there anymore. Everything is different, everything has changed. [Bojana (30), 18 August 2016, Bijeljina]

6.1.2. Concern over security issues

While in the earliest displacement period many Bijeljinan IDPs hoped that their predicament is only temporary, and were willing to return as soon as the war was over, the Dayton Peace Agreement *de facto* legalised territorial divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines, and made these displaced Serbs believe that it is safer to stay 'among their own' (ethnic group), on the territory of the Republika Srpska. In the immediate aftermath of the war, my interlocutors were mostly concerned for their security in their pre-war places of residence. This is one of the main reasons they mentioned while explaining why they have decided to resettle.

At the time when Bijeljinan IDPs needed to make a decision whether to return, their memories of traumatic experiences prior to the displacement were still fresh, and their fears still very justified. Many of my visibly upset interlocutors spoke how they or their family members used to be maltreated before they managed to escape from their towns and villages, and this maltreatment came either from their pre-war local political and military authorities, or their former co-citizens, colleagues and neighbours. As a minority population in their pre-war local societies, some of Bijeljinan IDPs recalled the situations in which they used to be threatened, beaten, illegally detained and questioned, fired from their workplaces, or sent to serve in the enemy army, while their apartments and other properties were demolished or forcefully seized in order to accommodate the members of the majority ethnic group. In some instances, Bijeljinan IDPs' attempts to return in possession of their pre-war dwellings which were occupied by Bosniak or Croat families, were met with obstruction and resistance of the local authorities in FBiH, or harassment of the temporary occupants. Due to the animosities felt, Bijeljinan IDPs believed that their lives would be in constant jeopardy if surrounded by the members of the former enemy ethnic group, and this fear made them feel detached from their pre-war towns and villages:

I used to be so connected to Sarajevo, but I have never thought of returning. When I went there for the first time [after the war], to reclaim my apartment, I saw all the ruins, and heard what was happening there during the war... You could see in the air [*moglo se vidjeti u vazduhu*] that nothing was as it used to be before. It was several years after the war, so there was fear everywhere. The Serbs were coming to get into repossession of their properties, but it was all in fear, despite the fact that the war was over. There was fear in people, they were all whispering, saying 'speak quietly, don't let them know who and what you are'... I didn't need to emphasize who I am, but I wanted to feel normal. So it didn't cross my mind to return there. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

On the other side, an extremely poor condition in which their properties were left by their Bosniak or Croat occupants, made them also feel detached from their very pre-war houses and apartments, which only strengthened their decision not to return:

When we entered our house first time after the war, of course, everything that could be taken away by the previous occupants, it had been taken away. I remembered how nice everything was, how nicely we arranged that house according to our own taste, and then we entered that house and everything was demolished. Even a bathtub and a water heater in the bathroom were pulled out and taken away. Then, all I could do was to feel sad after I saw it... Sad, because that was not my house anymore. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

My apartment was not completely destroyed, only a bit damaged when a grenade was thrown into it. But a Muslim occupant fixed it so that she could live in that apartment. That woman was not a refugee, just a local woman that occupied the apartment for herself. I got into repossession of it in the early 2000s. [...] Nothing was damaged inside, but every single piece of furniture, every single object in that apartment, had been taken away. Everything. Not even a piece of cloth was left. No pictures from the wall. But the saddest thing for me was the fact that there were no any of my photographs left, my memories were gone... Other things you could buy, but not your memories. And without them, it didn't feel like my house anymore. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Even if they have not experienced any inconveniences themselves, there is a widespread belief among Bijeljnan IDPs that life at the territory controlled by the enemy ethnic group, where these IDPs would be in minority, is everything but a guarantee of a safe and prosperous life. Many of my interlocutors would mention the cases of their mostly

elderly relatives, friends and neighbours, who have put their lives in danger since they decided to return in FBiH. Such personal stories have created a convincing argument for Bijeljina IDPs in favour of resettling in the Republika Srpska:

We have our properties in FBiH. They have remained there, we haven't sold them, because nobody would buy them. But we cannot return. One older man has returned, and he had many problems after that. Some Muslims, some nomads came to his property and they wanted to put their sheep to graze in that granddad's pasture without his permission. He was the only man who returned in that region which encompasses several [former] Serb villages. So they came and threatened him, they wanted to hurt him, so they got into fight... The old man had some sidearm for his own protection and he wanted to scare them down, but one man hit him with an axe in the head, and the granddad ended up in a hospital. Then they found the old man's wife too, and broke her arm. That was in 2004, or a year or two earlier. [...] So, he was the one who returned. And this is what happened to him. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

Although some of my interlocutors showed stronger connection to their pre-war places of residence and expressed willingness to return, they also believed that, in reality, their return would not be possible. In their opinion, security of Serbs in FBiH – especially in its rural areas, as well as their elementary human rights, are still not guaranteed as much as it is case with Bosniak returnees in Bijeljina, and Republika Srpska more widely. For example, some of my interlocutors said that their reconstructed houses in FBiH which they use for seasonal visits are being demolished over and over again, and that their Bosniak neighbours harvest their fields every year, without their knowledge and consent. At the same time, my interlocutors complained that the FBiH authorities have not been interested in helping them deal with their predicament, neither have they made an effort to find and punish the perpetrators:

If Serbs could have the same conditions for life in the FBiH, as Muslims have in the RS, I would return as soon as tomorrow. Tomorrow I would return. Here [in Bijeljina] nobody asks a Muslim if he is a Muslim, neither somebody endangers him [*niko ga ne dira*], or does something to make him feel bad. On the contrary – Muslims are being helped here, and I accept that. But there [in FBiH], no, that's not the case. I build something there, leave for three days only, and when I come back, there is nothing left – everything burnt, demolished.

MM: You are talking about the present time, not about something that was happening in the past?

Yes, the present time.

MM: Is your village inhabited by Bosniaks now?

No, it's completely deserted. It is two kilometres away from the road Tuzla-Sarajevo. Wherever there used to be Serbian villages, they have all been destroyed and deserted. There are ten or so Serb returnees there, those that did not have any other choice. Those without profession or title, some farmers or former miners. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

They [Bosniaks] have everything they want here, but when you mention how life for Serbs in FBiH is difficult, they all come and shout that it can't possibly be true! Well, ask people who live there. As soon as it gets dark, you need to lock your house. One day you have wheat in your field, you go to sleep that night, and in the morning everything is destroyed. And they never find out who did it. I have never heard that somebody was arrested for, or found guilty of, such crime. [Uroš (66), 14 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I have never wished to return. I *couldn't* ever return there. It's very problematic for us, the Serbs from Sarajevo, to return. Terribly difficult. They [FBiH authorities] are much more rigorous than us. We accept Muslims way better here, than they accept Serbs there. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

Bijeljina IDPs also tend to believe that it would not be a wise decision to live in those areas where they would constitute an ethnic minority. As already mentioned above, the mere fact that these IDPs were minority in their pre-war local societies, have made them become victims of diverse forms of discrimination, violence and intimidation at the outset of the armed conflict, and these are the experiences that my interlocutors see as a blueprint of what the life in a multi-ethnic society could look like if they decided to return. The experienced war between the three main Bosnian and Herzegovinian ethnic groups, and forcible displacement this war triggered, make my interlocutors feel afraid of a possible future conflict, where they would not stand a chance if surrounded by the members of the former enemy ethnic group. Thus, for Bijeljina IDPs, returning to their pre-war homes in the FBiH and re-establishing the status of ethnic minority, would at the same time mean constantly fearing for their safety, and lacking the feelings of freedom they have among their co-ethnics in the RS:

I would have never lived in the FBiH. I wouldn't, for sure. I don't think that it is smart to be minority among those bigger than yourself. I have been working in Russia, Qatar, Germany, I have seen a lot... I have felt nice everywhere, I have met different people, of different ethnicity and religion. I also have Muslims and Croats coming to my house for *slava*.⁴⁶ But I don't believe that it would be smart to live with my family someplace where we would be in minority. I have felt, I have *really* felt that war on my skin, and I don't want for my child to go through that experience in the future. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Some five-six years ago, I went to Tuzla to visit a cemetery where my father was buried. And then I realized what it means to be a minority population in FBiH. I arrived up there at the Orthodox cemetery and I started meeting some of my [Serb] friends and acquaintances that I went to elementary or high school together. I was so happy to see them, I was speaking loudly, asking about their lives and everything, but they would speak very quietly, they would whisper. I said: 'Come on, you can't possibly be afraid here, it's a 300 year-old Orthodox cemetery where nobody can hear you!' But no, it's the law of majority, it works in a way so that the voice of minority is suppressed and cannot be heard. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

What could be noticed in the interviews, and in numerous informal conversations with Bijeljina IDPs, is that this concern for physical safety, more often than not, did not rest in the first-hand experiences of my interlocutors, but rather in more general expectations that their lives would be in danger if subordinated to the authorities in the FBiH, or if surrounded by the members of the former enemy group. My interlocutors would always "know somebody" who experienced violence or who heard of the violence experienced by others, but only several of them went through such experience themselves. These violent episodes usually happened in the immediate aftermath of the war, when minority returnees were subjected to different forms of harassment and discrimination by the majority group and their ethno-national authorities (see e.g.

⁴⁶ *Slava*, or *krsna slava*, represents a Serbian Orthodox Christian tradition of the ritual glorification of a family's patron saint, and is celebrated annually, on the saint's feast day. *Slava* is a social event, which, among other, includes the family's church service attendance, a brief ritual held before the meal, and celebration with closest family members and friends over food and drinks, which sometimes lasts for several days. The content of meal depends on whether or not the celebration occurs in a period of fasting. An overwhelming majority of Serbs celebrates *slava*, even the non-religious ones. As recorded by Halpern (1977), the expression 'Where you have a *slava*, there you have a Serb' [*gdje ti je slava, tu ti je Srbin*], points to the widespread presence and significance of *slava* celebrations among the Serbian Orthodox Christian families.

Amnesty International 1998, 2000; Belloni 2005; European Stability Initiative 2007; Heimerl 2005; International Crisis Group 1997, 1997a, 1999, 2002; Sivac-Bryant 2016). In other instances, my interviewees had a subjective feeling of being under threat although they were not in a real and immediate danger. This feeling is evident in some of the excerpts above when they talked about experienced discomfort and fear because “it could be seen in the air” that “things are not as they used to be”, or that they felt they need to whisper while on the territory where they are in minority. Even though, in principle, the fear for physical safety is not an issue any more, the subjective feeling of being physically endangered remains quite evident in the narratives of Bijeljina IDPs. As it will be discussed in the following section, this feeling is interconnected with their strong belief that, due to the bloody three and a half-year armed conflict between them, different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina should never live again on ethnically mixed territories.

6.1.3. ‘We can live *next* to each other, but never again *with* each other’

Alongside Bijeljina IDPs’ belief –based on their wartime experiences and experiences of their relatives and friends– that it is not safe to be part of a minority population, there is also their more general conviction that it is simply impossible to live again with their former enemies, sharing the same territory, institutions, values, and visions for the future. For both male and female, and older and younger generations of Bijeljina IDPs, separation from other ethnic groups comes as a necessary condition for a free, peaceful, and prosperous life. Thus, another major reason behind Bijeljina IDPs’ decision to remain in their places of displacement has been the fact that in this way they are, to some extent, also remaining separated from other ethnic groups in Bosnia, and are staying on the territory which is controlled by ‘their own’ people, regulated by ‘their own’ laws and customs, and where they can freely practice ‘their own’ religion. My interlocutors would frequently sum up this stance in the following sentence: ‘we can live *next to* each other, but never again *with* each other’ [*možemo živjeti jedni pored drugih, ali nikada više jedni sa drugima*]:

The biggest objection I have, or the one thing I feel sad about, is when I think what I was fighting for... Three and a half years in the war, and now, in Republika Srpska, all three ethnic groups are declared constituent groups... If we already got separated, it should have stayed that way. We can live next to each other, but not with each other [*mi možemo živjeti jedni pored drugih, ali ne i jedni sa drugima*]. It's a fact. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

They want the entire Bosnia for themselves. And we... we are not that 'hungry', we are satisfied with what already belongs to us. We are well aware of the fact that they also have the right on Bosnia – a Croat and a Muslim has equal rights like us, we are not the only ones living here. I have nothing against them, there are so many nice Muslims and so many nice Croats. So, I suggest – let us all be nice, but one next to each other [*hajde da budemo fini, ali jedni pored drugih*]. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Some of my interviewees initially settled in Brčko (located some 40 kilometres west of Bijeljina), but after the town was established as a District under the dual sovereignty of both Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska in 2000, they decided to leave it and resettle in Bijeljina. They stated that the sole reason for leaving Brčko was the fact that they did not want to live again with Bosniaks and Croats, otherwise they would return to their pre-war homes in FBiH. Memories of the violent conflict were still fresh for these IDPs, and they found it difficult to restore peaceful co-existence and re-establish feeling of trust towards those who were their enemies for three and a half years:

I needed to leave, because my father had a 'wrong name'. We needed to leave all we had been creating for years. I have no memories left from my childhood, nothing. Somebody did it to me, somebody left me with no memories, without life I used to have, without all that. Well, if you divided us and put into three different cages [*u tri tora*], let us remain that way. Please, do not mix us with each other anymore. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Those who lost close family members during the war think that a potential return to their pre-war homes and re-establishment of the country's multi-ethnic demographic composition would somehow 'dishonour' those who died fighting for the Republika Srpska and Serbian people's interests. For many of them, restoring ethnic heterogeneity

throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina would also mean forgetting all their losses and experienced wartime traumas, which is something they feel they are still not ready for:

I doubt that our generation is going to forget all the victims, and everything that has happened to us. Because of the war, we lost all our properties, we were left with nothing, and we went into uncertainty with only one bag of basic possessions. We were saving our bare lives, and from then on, we were looking for the ways to improve our lives, in accordance with our best abilities and skills. But, in substance, that has made a lot of damage, and I think that generations need to come and go, until we manage to forget everything, and reconcile. A lot of time will need to pass until we forget. Muslims strive to create a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that's the craziest thing at this point in time... Those who lost their loved ones in the war, cannot forget it, and their smile –if I can say– is lost for as long as they are alive. This will leave mark on our children, too. As much as I hide my suffering because I lost my father and my brother in the war, my children can feel my pain. So, the next generation too will certainly feel these seclusions and divisions. [Zorana (49), 13 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I have a feeling that I would somehow 'give up' on my two killed brothers if I said: 'Yes, it would be better if we all live in unitary Bosnia, if there were no divisions, and if we all live together side by side'. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Many of my interlocutors admitted that when they were choosing where to resettle, they realised that Bijeljina has the most potential due to its proximity to the Republic of Serbia, and therefore, their fellow Serbian people. They even intentionally chose to settle in those villages within the Bijeljina municipality which are bordering Serbia, rather than those which are, although still on the territory of Republika Srpska, geographically more oriented towards Croatia and FBiH. As mentioned above, IDPs who now live in 'refugee neighbourhood' of Nova Janja requested from the local authorities to allocate the land where these IDPs would build their new homes in the areas of Bijeljina municipality which are closer to the Drina River, thus closer to Serbia, as well. In this view, by living on the majority-Serb territory, surrounded by their fellow Serbian people and guided by the institutions they trust, they are not only putting themselves in a position to feel more safe in case of another conflict, but are also getting the opportunity to feel more free to exercise their basic rights and freedoms. My

interlocutors believed that life in the FBiH would be impossible due to different official wartime narratives and memories of the past, different educational programmes, inability to freely exercise their linguistic and religious prerogatives, or due to obvious cultural differences which have become a sensitive topic since the war occurred, and are a restraining factor in everyday communication:

My best friend returned to Tuzla with his family, he tried to live there. And one day, his daughter comes from kindergarten and says: 'Hey, dad, do you know which day is today? It's the day when the Serb aggressors and criminals killed our *šehidi*⁴⁷! That was the moment when he realized that Tuzla is not the place he wants his children to grow up in. So, they came back to Bijeljina. [Ivan (47), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

They want to attach to the Serb people some bad labels... that we are like this and that, that we are villains and Chetniks [*Četnici*]⁴⁸ with long beards and knives, but the truth is that it wasn't the Serbs who had Jasenovac⁴⁹. But their aim is to create the impression that all the Serbs are villains. So how could I return there? [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I still think that I may return one day to Zenica. Right now I wouldn't go because I wouldn't have anybody there, because my children do not want to return. But, more subconsciously, I am sometimes thinking that I may return one day. Although, I would also be bothered to live alongside Muslims. Here in Bijeljina, I don't have a lot of contact with them, I just pass through Janja, but yeah, I would be bothered to live and work with them. I wouldn't be able to handle it. They also have changed, they have their own language, which I don't understand. I love my Cyrillic, and they don't. I wouldn't, I wouldn't be able to live with them. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

⁴⁷ *Šehidi* or 'martyrs' are Muslims who have lost their lives fulfilling a religious commandment, or have died fighting or defending their faith or family. See Bougarel (2007) for the analysis of the 'cult of *šehidi*' in the Bosniak-dominated part of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the 1992-1995 war.

⁴⁸ *Četnici* [*Chetniks*] were the royalist and nationalist Serbian movement during the Second World War, notorious for committed mass murders and war crimes, which were primarily directed towards Yugoslav Partisans. Since the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this word has been used in a derogatory sense to describe all Serbian nationalists.

⁴⁹ Jasenovac was one of the largest concentration camps in Europe during the Second World War, established in Slavonia (part of Croatia) by the Ustaše regime of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). The majority of almost 100,000 victims of Jasenovac were Serbs, Jews, and Roma.

I remember back then when we all lived together how we would go to some celebrations, or would go out... And we would start drinking, dancing, singing... And you would always have that limiting factor –to call it that way– you would have that subconscious thought how you are not supposed to sing something because it might offend somebody else in that company. Here [in the RS] I can say whatever I want, and I won't offend anybody. There [in the FBiH], it's different, they have different culture and religion... [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Due to the violence experienced during the 1992-1995 war, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors strongly believed that a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a part of history, something that could never be called 'home' or 'homeland' again. They stated that any meaningful connection with their former neighbours and friends of different ethnic origin was lost with the 1992-1995 war, and that the damage done to the relationship of 'good neighbourliness' [*komšiluk*] between different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina has simply become irreparable. They believed that they have been taught many 'historical lessons' concerning the life in a multi-ethnic society as a non-success story, and that there is no excuse for making the same mistake over and over again. As starting a new life in majority-Serb Bijeljina was the opportunity to 'correct' these past mistakes, some efforts towards re-creation of a unitary and ethnically heterogeneous Bosnia and Herzegovina, were seen as unwelcome and unacceptable for many:

I don't want to go back there, I don't want to fight. Haven't we already had the war and fighting? And I gave them my land, my properties, and I left. But they want to live together, they follow us, they are coming to live here in Bijeljina, in Janja, do you understand? Listen to me [Muslims and Croats], I don't want to be with you, I don't want any more fighting, and I don't want to socialize with you. And you still keep following me. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I have never hated anybody. Not even in the war I hated Muslims, as I don't hate them now. But, let me be [*pusti me*], we have been fighting, we have been in war with each other, and then I withdrew to be on the Serbian land. So, let me be. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

For all of my interviewees, regardless of their gender, age, education and urban-rural origin, separation from the other two ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina comes as

a necessary condition for a peaceful and prosperous life, which reveals their strong identification with their respective ethnic group. As majority of above excerpts illustrate, Bijeljina IDPs' narratives about the necessity of remaining secluded from the ethnic other are filled with 'us'/'we' vs. 'them' dichotomies, whereby, like with any other social identifications (see Chapter 2), 'we' was always compared favourably against 'them' (*they* want the entire Bosnia for themselves, while *we* are satisfied with what already belongs to *us*; *they* want to attach to *us* some bad labels while it is *them* who are actually bad; *their* aim is to vilify *us*; *here* (in RS) I can say whatever I want, while *there* (in FBiH) I cannot, etc. – from the excerpts above). My interlocutors' sense of ethnic belonging is also evident in some of the excerpts above where they are challenging the ethnic stereotypes about their own (Serbian) ethnic group, while, at the same time, reinforcing ethnic stereotypes about the other (Bosniak or Croat) group (*they* say that we are Chetniks, but how about *them* having Jasenovac; I love my Cyrillic, and *they* don't – from the excerpts above). Importantly, favouring 'us' and being 'on our own' and 'among our own' seems to be a sort of a "banalized" (Billig 1995) way of thinking of Bijeljina IDPs, a stance that nobody tries to challenge, while its political, social or moral rightness nobody calls into question. As will be discussed below, just like Bijeljina IDPs see the ethnic engineering campaigns of their ethno-national leadership as completely justified actions –if not even a 'natural' response to the armed conflict and the way in which this conflict was resolved– their opinion that different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not share the same territory again, also seems to be almost routinely and 'naturally' believed, and considered as indisputably correct.

6.2. Ethnic identity of Bijeljina IDPs

As the previous section has demonstrated, although Bijeljina IDPs were given this opportunity immediately after the war (therefore, just a few years after their displacement), and were encouraged and helped by the international community to do so, they did not wish to return to their pre-war homes, neither do they, more than two decades since the end of the war, show any remorse for making this decision. It has also been argued that Bijeljina IDPs' decision not to return has to do with the very

characteristics of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. Ethnic cleansing and other acts of violence among former neighbours and friends have largely destroyed people's perception of 'home' in the wider sense of this concept, so that the places they used to live in and feel attached to, are now felt to be lost both in place and time. As a sort of a strategy for easier and less painful process of moving on with their lives, it seems as if Bijeljina IDPs have refused to long for what has been lost, and what, in their view, could never be the same as it was before the war.

Apart from this, Bijeljina IDPs would frequently explain their decision not to return in the context of their conviction that it is not wise to be again part of a minority population, as well as that it is simply impossible to live side by side with the members of the wartime enemy ethnic groups. My interlocutors believed that the 'normal life' could not be restored in their pre-war towns and villages, at the territories controlled by another ethnic group and a former warring party, and they rejected any idea of a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. While such a stance could partially be explained through Bijeljina IDPs' concern for their safety – especially in the early post-war period, it could also be understood through their strong identification with their respective ethnic group.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the 1992-1995 violent conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have revived and intensified the ethno-national identifications of all Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens, and this process has continued in post-war period, too. Besides ethnic cleansing employed during the war, the ethno-national elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also led the intensive campaigns of ethnic engineering, aiming to persuade their co-ethnic IDPs to permanently settle in the places of refuge, i.e. the areas where their ethnic group constitutes the majority. In these ethno-nationalist discourses, displaced persons were being convinced that being 'at home' actually meant living among members of one's own nation, and on one's own territory (Jansen 2006). As a consequence, both the ethnic cleansing and the ethnic engineering campaigns encouraged ethnic homogenisation throughout the country, and solidified divisions between its main ethnic groups which had been accomplished during the war. Therefore, although all of my interlocutors claimed that particular measures within the ethnic engineering policy (such as handing free plots of land and building material to help IDPs' resettlement), did not influence their decision not to return (or, in case of Sarajevan Serbs, to leave their homes after the war was over), the general

wartime and post-war “ideology of remaining” (Stefansson 2006), proclaimed and utilized by the Serb ethno-national elites, has certainly played a central role in Bijeljina IDPs’ resettlement strategies. This is apparent in some of the excerpts from the previous section, where my interlocutors explained their decision not to return through more abstract convictions, ideological beliefs and political ideas, rather than their personal experiences. For example, such are the statements that they can live only at the territory controlled by their respective ethnic group, that members of other ethnic groups would hurt them just because they are Serbs, that their basic rights and freedoms cannot be guaranteed under the rule of the ‘ethnic other’, that they feel their ethnicity is written on their forehead like a sort of ‘target’, or that the fact that there was fighting between different ethnic groups in the past prevents them from living together, as there is no possibility of reconciliation and coming to terms with the past.

The political manipulation of ethno-national authorities to which these IDPs were subjected in relation to their ‘return vs. resettlement’ strategies, is one of the reasons why there has been a common opinion that the displaced persons, in comparison to other population groups, are holding more extreme positions when it comes to the question of ethno-national belonging (see Chapter 2). In other words, if IDPs did not develop a strong sense of ethnic identity, they could not be easily persuaded by their respective ethno-national political elites to make resettlement decisions as they did. As it has been described in Chapter 2, the resentment caused by their traumatic displacement experience, and their presumed rural background, are additional reasons why IDPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been identified with nationalism, political and religious extremism, and higher level of intolerance towards the members of other ethnic groups (see e.g. Eastmond 2006; Jašarević 2007; Poggi et al. 2002; Stefansson 2007). When it comes to ethnic identifications of Bijeljina IDPs in particular, e.g. the way in which they see themselves in the context of their belonging to a specific ethno-national group, the findings obtained through participant observation, interviews and numerous informal conversations, point out that these identities are negotiated not only in relation to the ethnic other (i.e. Muslims/Bosniaks, and, more rarely, Croats), but they are also, in certain aspects, negotiated in relation to other population groups within the nominally ‘same’ ethnic group (i.e. the local Serbs in Bijeljina).

6.2.1. Being a displaced Serb in Bijeljina

The basic anthropological model of ethnicity defines it as collective identification based in perceived cultural differentiation which is concerned with culture (shared meanings), but it is rooted in –and is a product of– social interactions, especially across boundaries (Jenkins 2000: 7). Bringa (1993: 83) notes that one group’s identity formation is dependent on the presence of the other group, “since it is mainly through its presence that a person is taught awareness of his or her own ethnic identity”. Thus, ethnic identity, like any other social identity (see Chapter 2), is a product of social interaction and process of boundary maintenance, rather than a set of defined characteristics of group organisation. In relationships across these boundaries, the features that are taken into account are not simply the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those differences which the actors themselves regard as relevant and important (Barth 1969). In order to understand the way in which Bijeljinar IDPs identify themselves with a particular ethnic group, the attention in this chapter is given to their own understanding of what it means to be a Serb in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and Bijeljina in particular, and how this understanding has drawn the boundaries vis-à-vis other groups. Special emphasis was given to the way that the war and forcible displacement have affected the Bijeljinar IDPs’ ethnic identification process.

All of my interviewees, regardless of their gender, age, educational level or urban-rural origin, have a very strong sense of their ethnic identity which dominates over many other forms of identification (e.g. belonging to the local community or specific geographical region). The main aspect of their identity is that they are the Serbs of Christian Orthodox religion, who speak Serbian language, and who consider the Republika Srpska (and, in certain cases, the Republic of Serbia, too) to be their ethnic homeland. In opinion of my interlocutors, a person’s ethnic identity is manifested through being proud to be a Serb, and through expressing this pride more openly (celebrating the Republika Srpska’s holidays, publicly showing the entity’s insignia, being vocal in defending the Serb national interests etc.). For some, as the below statement of 36-year old Nikola exemplifies, the categories of ethnicity and nationality, or ethnic identity and nationalism, are being blurred and intertwined. However, as it will be also seen in some other examples below, for my interlocutors in Bijeljina ‘nationalism’ is mostly positively evaluated, meaning that it is generally considered to

be a virtue, in spite of the public discourse which sees ethno-nationalism as the main culprit for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the country's stagnation in post-war years. Of course, positive evaluation is implied only when they talk about 'their' nationalism, but not about the nationalism of others.

Nationalism means that there is something *mine*, and there is something *yours*. What precisely is this *mine* and *yours*, I am really not sure. Nationalism was brought down to mean that you are a Serb, of Christian Orthodox religion, that you don't let some Muslim or Croat disrespect something that is yours. It is defined not only in relation to Muslims and Croats, but to a Serb from Serbia, as well. We are here maybe a bit tougher nationalists [than Serbs in Serbia]. I don't say it in a sense that we are, for example, more aggressive, but we are somehow protecting our Serb national identity in a stronger and firmer manner. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

6.2.1.1. Territory

The question of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina being able to control their own territory and institutions, is of great importance for Bijeljinar IDPs. Consequently, they all showed a highly critical stance towards any externally imposed solutions which would go in favour of a unitary and more ethnically mixed Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bijeljinar IDPs would often state that they have managed to overcome their wartime traumas and losses only due to the fact that they are now at least able to live on 'their own' territory of the Republika Srpska, where they feel free and safe among 'their own' people, with whom they share the common language and religion. This aspect of their self-understanding is always mentioned as a part of their identification process in relation to the ethnic other (i.e. Muslims/Bosniaks, and Croats):

I have some relatives in America, and let me tell you – they are not happy. They went to America in 1998, bought a house which they are supposed to pay in 30 years. They went there because of their children, to make their lives easier and better. One daughter of that cousin of mine got married to a Croat, and she lives 300 kilometres away from him. A son also got married and he lives 200 kilometres away from him. His wife got a stroke, and she died. He was left with

nothing. And look at me – I've built a house, I've bought an apartment in the city for my daughter, I have my workshop in front of the house, and I also have a pension... And he, he doesn't have anything. I might not be in my *rodni kraj*, and I might not be *Semberac* [a person from Semberija] – maybe my grandchildren will be, but this is *mine*, this is Republika Srpska. So, I am better off than him, because I am *at home*. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

What do they want from us? I have lost my *zavičaj*, Republika Srpska is my new *zavičaj*, and you are now telling me that I am an aggressor, that I am a villain, and that I've made a genocide. What do you want from me? Tell me, what do you want from me? *You* want to come and abolish my new *zavičaj*, Republika Srpska. You expelled me from my old *zavičaj*, you took my right to live wherever I wanted. So, you took that *zavičaj* from me, and now you want to take another one. But, we have to understand that there are many more of them, than there are Serbs in this country. And from their side, I feel hatred. They have that rhetoric like we are destroying their country, we don't want to live with them, we don't want to do like they say. But shouldn't common life and co-existence be based on mutual agreement, compromise, that I accept you as different as you are from me, and that you also accept me the same way? [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Now they are proposing some idea of 'small Yugoslavia', just like Serbs wanted to preserve the big Yugoslavia [in 1992]. Back then, nobody consider *them* separatists, but Serbs are considered separatists today. But that 'small Yugoslavia' cannot function without Croats and Serbs... Sometimes when they want to be honest, they explain why they are upset with Serbs. (They say that they are 'upset', because they don't want to say that they 'hate' us). So, they say, it is because the Serbs are oriented towards Serbia, which for them is a threat that we will one day get united with Serbia. But my personal opinion is, if it happened that Serbs who now live in Republika Srpska feel nice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I am sure that they we would never wish to leave. But if you are repeatedly telling us that we are aggressors, invaders, criminals, then you are constantly reminding us that we don't feel nice in this country, and that we all should look for a better 'house' for ourselves, on some new address. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

In all the three statements above, my interviewees replaced the sense of belonging to their pre-war regions, towns and villages, to the sense of belonging to the Republika Srpska and the wider community of Bosnian Serbs who constitute this entity's majority population. Also, all the three statements show how passionately my interviewees talked about this topic, revealing how important is ethnic identification to these people (with frequently used 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy – “what do they want from us?”; “there are many more of them, than there are us”; “they have that rhetoric like we don't want to live with them”; “you took my *zavičaj* from me”; etc.), which sometimes has the forms of “banal nationalism” (Billig 1995), or of those more positive and non-violent manifestations of ethnic identity (“I might not be in my *rodni kraj*, and I might not be *Semberac* – maybe my grandchildren will be, but this is *mine*, this is Republika Srpska, where I am better off than my co-ethnics abroad”).

The excerpts above also demonstrate how important *the specific territory* is in this particular identification process of Bijeljina IDPs. In the previous section of this chapter, my interviewees were extremely vocal in stressing the fact that they can only live *next to* the other two main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressing satisfaction for being physically secluded from them, and revealing their deep connection to the territory on which they have been resettled (“I withdrew to be on the Serbian land. So, let me be.”). Similarly, in the excerpts above, my interviewees explicitly referred to the Republika Srpska as their new home or new homeland (“this is mine, this is Republika Srpska, and I am at home”, “Republika Srpska is my new *zavičaj*”). The fact that many of my interlocutors mentioned the DPA as a turning point in their post-displacement lives which solidified their resettlement decision (see also Chapter 5), is also implying Bijeljina IDPs' bond with the predominantly-Serb territory of Republika Srpska. This is because the DPA *de facto* legalized ethnic divisions in the country (see Chapter 3), allowing Bijeljina IDPs to have 'their own' territory, inhabited by 'their own' people, with whom they believe to be sharing a number of common features and a sense of belonging to the 'same' ethnic group.

The importance of the territory for Bijeljina IDPs' identification process has to be put in the context of the sedentarist argument which sees identities as naturally 'rooted' and cultures spatially localized, i.e. 'attached' to specific territories. In this view, displacement or 'uprooting' of people is understood as an inner pathological condition of the displaced, an “ultimate human tragedy” (Malkki 1995: 16; also Malkki 1992),

rather than as a fact about socioeconomic condition. On the other side, analysing the two communities of Hutu refugees in Western Tanzania –one being settled in a rigorously organized and isolated refugee camp, and the other living in a more fluid town setting– Malkki (1992) showed that for some categories of displaced people ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ was not so much a territorial or topographic entity as it was a moral destination, while for others ‘homeland’ represented nothing more but a simple ‘place’. Moreover, a study on the Mursi people in Ethiopia (Turton 2005: 267; also Turton 1988) demonstrated that there are people who do not have ‘homes’ or ‘homelands’ in a strict territorial sense, but are in continuous ‘search of cool ground’, meaning that they are “engaged in an ongoing ‘project’ of place-making and self-reproduction”, thus “not harking back to an imagined place of origin, but forward to an imagined and *ideal* place of arrival”. This and similar other cases show that geographical mobility is a normal rather than pathological aspect of life (Allen and Turton 1996). For some communities which, unlike the Mursi people in Ethiopia, experienced devastating wars and horrific violence which led them to flee, going back to their pre-displacement ‘home’ does not represent a desirable option because it more often implies ‘reconstructing’ these communities from scratch, than automatically recreating a sense of ‘belonging’ to the specific territory (ibid.).

The argument that people and cultures cannot be seen as naturally ‘rooted’ in certain territories does not negate the importance of ‘place’ for negotiation and renegotiation of social identities. Jansen and Löfving (2009) argue that territorial rooting of identification (sedentarist argument) should not be taken for granted, but neither the argument that identities are completely deterritorialized (anti-sedentarist argument). The case of Bijeljina IDPs demonstrates exactly that – while their decision not to return goes against the sedentarist view which sees people as forever rooted and in search of restoring this ‘natural order’ once it is (violently) disturbed, on the other side, their practices of identification in post-displacement period are still negotiated in relation to certain territory. However, in spite of its obvious importance, the accent does not seem to be only on the territory itself, but on all those qualities which come with that territory, such as feelings of security, freedom, familiarity and ‘normalcy’ in a sense of being able to become future-oriented and hope for better socio-economic scenarios for themselves and their families. In the view of Bijeljina IDPs, such qualities could only become achievable if they were not subjected to the rule of the former enemy

groups, even if it meant not returning to the places they used to call 'homes'. Thus, by establishing the Serb-dominated autonomous entity of Republika Srpska, the DPA played a role in Bijeljina IDPs' resettlement decision insofar as it offered them the possibility to *feel at home* again, after the places they called homes up to that point, lost all those qualities that could qualify them as such.

6.2.1.2. Religion

Many Bijeljina IDPs also believe that ethnicity has a lot to do with religion: being a Serb actually means being a devoted and an observant believer (going to the church, celebrating religious holidays, practicing fasting, etc.). Some of them explained that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a religious war, and that ethnic identities have been built in a strong relation with religion – therefore, they are two inseparable concepts:

I think that older people are more religious, and I think they didn't used to be so religious before the war, at least our people [*izbjeglice*] didn't. It's a consequence of the war, and also, people put equation mark between the concepts of religion and ethnicity, in a sense that you are not a 'real' Serb if you don't go to the church, you are not a Serb if you don't believe in God, if you are not of an Orthodox religion. In general, ethnic identity is very important to our population, especially because we are facing big propaganda from the media. To our entire population it has become very important to show that we are 'real' Serbs. [Milica (34), 15 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I wish we all go more to the church, starting from myself, and my family. I wish we had that something... We are bragging about being the Serbs, but we don't really know much about many things, starting from our religion. As a start, I would really love that every Serb fasts on every single Wednesday and Friday. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Such a stance of Bijeljina IDPs does not represent a coincidence. Religious differences play a greater role in shaping of ethno-national identity in religiously heterogeneous regions and countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Velikonja (2003) especially emphasises the importance of religious and cultural factors in the emergence and development of ethnic identity of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, firstly because of the

religious and cultural heterogeneity of the country, and secondly, because of the absence of other nation-building factors. Bringa (1993) stresses that in Bosnia and Herzegovina religious identity overlaps with national or ethnic identity for all three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks are Sunni Muslims, Serbs Orthodox Christians and Croats Roman Catholics). Thus, in Bosnia, “religion is more than a set of beliefs. It is part of a person’s cultural identity, whether or not one is a believer” (81). Eriksen (2001) points out that religion turned out to be the central marker of collective identity in the Bosnian conflict, whereby the effective boundary was drawn between different religious categories. One of my interviewees held the similar position regarding an increased importance of religion during the 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

People have become more religious because of the war. Already during the war, they saw the ethnically-based hatred of other ethnic groups, so they started to foster their own religion, customs and tradition, to glorify their own nation, too. But it has happened to all ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The war has intensified that national identity and national belonging of each and every man in Bosnia. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Many of my interlocutors admitted that they have become more religious in the post-war period, than they used to be before the war. They would also frequently state that *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina are more religious than the local Serb population (see also Chapter 7). Several priests in Bijeljina also confirmed that it is a well-known fact among the Orthodox clergy in Semberija that churches in those neighbourhoods which are predominantly inhabited by the displaced population are always more crowded than in those parts of municipality where the local Serb population constitutes the majority. Likewise, all of my interviewees who belong to the category of local Serbs in Bijeljina believed that *izbjeglice* are far more religious than *Semberci*. For some of Bijeljina IDPs, it was the experience of war and forcible displacement, as well as various personal traumas and losses, that brought them closer to religion and made them look for consolation in regular church visits:

I did not used to go to the church before, but now I do... Not that I am afraid of the opinion of others and I go because of them, but I go to the church now because of myself. [...] You know that stronger religiosity comes with the war. When misery comes and knocks on your door, then you start fearing everything. You become even superstitious, something you had never been before. When

everything is going well in your life, you don't think about God, or what your neighbour will tell you. But when things go south, then you are afraid of everything. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Izbjeglice are definitely going more often to the church. In the local church where my parents live, when I go and visit, there are usually only *izbjeglice* at the liturgy. When the church is celebrating *slava* of the village, also – only *izbjeglice* are attending. My parents, for example, they were religious before the war, especially my mother. When my brothers were killed in the war, religion helped her a lot. She has become calmer since she started going to the church on every Sunday. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

I don't know, I guess that *izbjeglice* are a bit more religious [than locals]. I am not sure whether it was before the war too, or it only happened after the war. Half of my family was religious before the war, while the other half didn't, they were all in the [Communist] Party. Now we have *vjeronauka* [religious studies] in school, so we developed a habit to fast, for example, so my mother also accepted it from us, and she started fasting too. *Semberci* go to church more rarely. I am not sure why. Maybe those [*izbjeglice*] have suffered more, have gone through much more stress, it has all been shocking experience for them. So, maybe they starting feeling afraid of God, and destiny, fearing that something bad could happen to them again. It has all been a huge shock, a huge change in their lives. When they were the youngest, and in full strength to enjoy their life, the war happened to them. [Tijana (30), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

On the other side, there is also a considerable number of my interlocutors who believed that in case of the Serb population in Bijeljina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina more broadly, religious activities have been popularized by the Serb ethno-national elites in order to be used as a means of ethnic mobilization and homogenisation. Indeed, as a “powerful regulator of collective memories”, and a keeper of a nation's sacral symbols of identity, religion is often transformed into a strategic resource for political goals, especially at the times of crises such as the ethnic conflict (Zrinščak 2013: 199). The 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina too witnessed the alliance between nationalist policies and religious communities, which were supporting each other and were mutually dependent (Velikonja 2003). Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, for political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina –especially those belonging to the nationalist

parties– participation in religious rituals represented a tacit civil duty, while the spiritual oaths given by politicians at the start of the mandate seeking for the spiritual legitimacy alongside the democratic one, have become a commonplace (Ljubić and Marko 2011). My interlocutors spoke about this practice with disapproval, criticizing both the Serb political elites and the Serb population more generally, for treating religiosity as ‘a trend’ which is supposed to ‘prove’ their ‘Serb-ness’ and their commitment to the Serbian national cause. According to them, as being non-religious was popular in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, being extremely religious has become popular since this country’s breakup:

I am much closer to the church and religion now, that what I used to be before the war. We used to live differently back then. It is not that we did not have respect for the church, but we hadn’t been taught to go to the church either. Now, my children know much more about the church than me, because they have *vjeronauka* [religious studies] in school. So, system and society have imposed it on our children. [...] I also think that suffering that people have gone through, the losses they have had... many of them found consolation in religion. But, it’s also true that it has become like some sort of trend, people want to be seen [*da budu viđeni*] in the church or at some church celebration. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Since the war, the church has become like some sort of trend. If a politician is in the church, TV stations will be there, too. If politician is not there, then why even bother serving a liturgy? During the electoral campaigns –I was politically active, so this is the first-hand experience– as soon as one politician comes to the church, the other candidate will pay visit, too. Church is like some kind of their ruling instrument, a means for animating the masses, a tool for competition over who is going to win more political points among the believers. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

When everybody is fine and we live in abundance, just a few of us would say let’s go to the church, unless we inherited some religiosity from our ancestors. [...] I remember, in the very beginning of the war, I would enter the church and there were two priests, and maybe five women and two men – I was the third one to be there. Church was empty. But then, during the war, army generals would come, policemen, politicians, you couldn’t enter the church, that’s how many of them would be there! It became a trendy thing [to go to the church]. After the war,

there were fewer and fewer of them; they would come only when TV cameras would appear during some holidays, in order to be seen [*da budu viđeni*]. There are also those whose fear of death forced them to become more religious. Or people who lost somebody – they, for example, searched for some consolation in religion. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I am irritated by that. I am irritated that everyone has become a big Serb out of sudden. Many who were running away from the church, who have never even crossed themselves in their lives, they are now, let's say it that way, not exiting the church at all! That's how big believers they suddenly have become! That's something I don't like. I, for example, I have remained the same. As much as I respected the church before, I respect it now. I respect all Serbian holidays, *slava*, Christmas, Easter, and so on. My father used to celebrate *slava*, and I was attending it, even though I was a member of the [Communist] Party. [...] When I see now who goes to the church, and how people suddenly changed and became some big Serbs –and I know very well what they were like before the war– that's something I do not support. You have to have respect for your religion, and your *slava*, but to exaggerate that much?!... They think they are better Serbs if they go to the church and pray there, better Serbs than me, but I believe that they are not at all better Serbs than me. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

6.2.1.3. Ethnic other

As it has been mentioned above, Bijeljinar IDPs' ethnic identification process is negotiated in relation to the ethnic other, which refers to the Bosnian Muslims, and, for those IDPs who used to live in majority-Croat regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina before the war, to Bosnian Croats, too. Not even one of my interviewees referred to Bosnian Muslims using their current name – Bosniaks, which was introduced during the war in 1993. Instead, they were using the pre-war name 'Muslims', or sometimes even largely pejorative name 'Turks'. None of my interviewees supported any form of violence, while those who participated in military actions during the war clearly stated that they would never fight again. However, 'for the safety of the whole country', and due to the 'lessons learnt' in the past wars, they strongly believed that members of different ethnic and

religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be kept on a safe distance among themselves, which was one of the main reasons for their decision to resettle in Bijeljina after forcible displacement:

No, we have never thought of returning. Not even for much better employment, business and financial opportunity, we wouldn't go. I am not a nationalist, but I consider myself a big patriot. I think that my children are the same, that I consciously or unconsciously thought them of that feeling too. In my opinion, we can be friends with people of different ethnicity and religious affiliation, we can spend time together and do some things together, but I would never wish to build close family relations with them. I believe that our [displaced people's] personal experience has solidified these viewpoints. I have sacrificed myself and spent time in refugee camps for peace, to sleep peacefully... Now I live in a very small apartment, but it is worth if there is peace. I don't feel well when I sleep someplace else. I don't have fear or any problem in communication [with the members of other ethnic groups], but those scary wartime images are coming back to me, I haven't overcome it yet. I cannot recall every single detail, which I believe is some kind of my own defence mechanism. Because if I go into too many details, the picture is not pretty at all. So yes – I have nothing against [the members of other ethnic groups], on the contrary, I am even ready to go an extra mile to preserve what we have now, but the truth is, I sleep more peacefully in the Republika Srpska. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

For some of my interlocutors, their very displacement experience has played an important role in the process of creating a negative image of the members of other ethnic groups. They often complained about being in disadvantage in post-war years due to international community's preferential treatment of Bosniak returnees in Bijeljina. Not only that Bijeljina IDPs have been deprived of any international support – from policymaking to the more tangible material assistance and humanitarian aid, because the international policymakers supported minority returns but not resettlement– but they have often been denied the support of their own local and entity authorities, as this kind of support was characterized as ethnic engineering by this very same international community (because of this, Bijeljina was under economic sanctions of the USA administration from 2001 to 2008, unable to use donor funds; see Chapter 4). My interlocutors also believed that, unlike Bosniak returnees in Bijeljina, Serb returnees in the FBiH have been subjected to different forms of discrimination which

has remained unrecognized by international policymakers, and this presumed injustice make them feel even more antagonistic towards the 'ethnic other':

My best friend is a Muslim, and I would never give up on our friendship. But I am extremely annoyed when I see women wearing hijab in Bijeljina. I am very irritated by that. I am not annoyed by a mosque itself, but with their showing off, like they are saying: 'Here we are again!' I have nothing against *hodža*⁵⁰ either, but do they need to have such loud prayers? It's like they want to say: 'Here we are again, and we are *above you!*' This is something that only Serbs would allow. In Bijeljina, you can be a Muslim without a problem, but in Sarajevo and Tuzla, you cannot be a Serb. [...] I don't like that arrogance. In my opinion, hijab in Bijeljina – it cannot be, Bosnian language in Bijeljina – it cannot be, like Serbian language or an Orthodox cross in Sarajevo cannot be, but there these *really* cannot be. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Janja was not touched during the war. Everybody has returned to their homes. Maybe some furniture was taken when they returned, but houses were not damaged or something like that. Whatever they left in their houses, they found it when they returned. Plus, they got some foreign donations, and they have built a house in Tuzla, and they have one in Janja. Or they lived abroad but were visiting Bosnia occasionally to get these donations... You should see what Janja looks like today! Well, I would like to take them to my *rodni kraj* where Serbs were majority before the war, so that they can see what has been left of it. Where are all those Serbian villages? Where are all those Serbian houses? There is nothing left. By the look of it, you could never say there used to be entire villages there. They have been given everything here, they allowed for them to change the street names in Janja, and they are still not satisfied. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Many other interviewees said that they still keep in touch with some of their former friends and neighbours from other ethnic groups, usually via social media, and usually on occasions such as religious and other holidays, when congratulations from both sides are in order. Some also nostalgically recalled those pre-war times when they lived in peace and unity and 'nobody really cared about ethnicity and religion, but how good a man somebody was'. There are many Bijeljinan IDPs whose professional activities

⁵⁰ *Hodža* is a religious title that is used for Muslim priests and religious teachers.

spread throughout the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who find in the members of other ethnic groups close associates, colleagues, and business partners. This shows that on an individual level there is a potential for putting animosities aside, or even for correcting and softening individual attitudes and behaviours, but this is still not enough to reduce the overall negative perception on a collective (group) level. An overwhelming majority of my interlocutors, including younger generations and IDPs from urban areas, expressed the feelings of antipathy and antagonism towards the 'ethnic other', rejecting to establish any close relationship with the members of other ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Back then, I didn't hate anybody. But now, when I recall everything, I remember how 15 of my Serb female neighbours got married to Muslims, and only one Muslim woman got married to a Serb man, and they didn't let her stay with him, not even for six months. Now I realize why. And I am happy that my children have realized that they have their own religion. They shouldn't disrespect anybody else's, but they should have respect for their own. In my opinion, it's better for my children to marry a Serb without a leg, than to marry a Muslim and change their religion. We [Serbs]... we cared less about religion in Yugoslavia. Back then, I wouldn't care to marry a Muslim myself, I had many Muslim girlfriends. But now, I cannot imagine to celebrate my family's *slava* with somebody like that. To be next to each other – that's all right, just to be good neighbours. But some kind of co-existence and cohabitation – no way, there is no perspective there. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

I have an impression that people in Semberija were somehow more connected to those Muslims who left Bijeljina due to the war. Although, we cannot generalize things. It's probably all normal, because they did not have any personal loss, any personal tragedy in their family. Me – I cannot do that, I simply don't like them. This does not mean that I would ever offend them, or attack them. I am also connected with them through my work, they congratulate me Christmas, for example, but I have never returned congratulation wishes. I simply can't. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Now that I have my own children, I understand why my parents were so strict and they didn't let me date someone of different religion. Then, I didn't know why it is so bad, but now, that I have my own children, I understand their fear. Or, for example, I know an elderly couple who didn't let their son marry a Croat

girl, so he married a local girl from Semberija later on. Back then I was thinking how they destroyed lives of their son and that Croat girl, but now, I wouldn't let my son marry a Croat girl either. I can't explain why I feel this way, but I just believe that it's better to stay close to your own people, and to your own religion. I consider a nationalist to be something bad, and I don't consider myself to be one, but I would never go to summer holidays in Croatian coast, for example. And I would not let my children socialize with their children, if possible. [...] I am educating my children never to hurt anyone, to help other people whenever they can, but, if any possible, not to form family relations with people of other religion. I don't know why I think in this way, probably some fear exists. [Milica (34), 15 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I am bothered by Muslims in Bijeljina. For example, I have never bought *ćevapi*⁵¹ in a shop where a Muslim is an owner. If I have to choose between this and that – doesn't matter what, I would always choose *our* man. I am bothered by mosques in Bijeljina, too. I simply don't love them. I don't know, I guess I am a nationalist. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In all of the above statements, my interviewees quite explicitly expressed their antagonism towards the ethnic other, and showed a considerable level of ethnic exclusivism. In that sense, Bijeljinan IDPs do not make an exception to the fact that the breakup of Yugoslavia and the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina have revived and intensified the ethno-national identifications of all Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens. Thus, while for my interviewee Sreten (60) it was completely acceptable or completely 'normal' to marry a Muslim girl within the Yugoslav model of 'brotherhood and unity' which encouraged ethnically mixed marriages, now he is in favour of intragroup endogamy, whereby he would rather see his children "marrying a Serb without a leg", than marrying a Muslim (excerpt above). Being overwhelmingly shaped by traditional understandings of gender and gender roles, this especially stands true for his daughter. Marrying a daughter to a Muslim would imply her changing her religion which, within nationalist ideology that sees women as 'mothers of the nation', would be considered a great misfortune for the rest of her family. The statement of 34-year old Milica that she would not allow her son to marry a Croat girl neither her children to

⁵¹ *Ćevapi* is a grilled dish of minced meat, found traditionally in the countries of Southeast Europe. *Ćevapi* is considered a national dish in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

socialize with children of Bosniak or Croat ethnicity, as well as of 33-year old Darko that he would never dine in a restaurant owned by a Muslim (excerpts above), show that ethnic exclusivism continues its strong presence within younger generations too, even though they were only children at the time of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia.

At the same time, in the excerpts above my interviewees avoided to explicitly employ negative ethnic stereotypes which could be used as a motive for their antagonism towards Bosniaks and Croats, but instead, they justified their stances through some kind of inexplicable fear of the ethnic other (“I don’t know why I think in this way, probably some fear exists”). Similarly, in the statement of 51-year old Jasna (above) it is noticeable that she is “bothered” by mosques and Muslim prayers because she seems afraid of Serbs in Bijeljina being endangered or overshadowed by Bosniaks, just as she fears that this is exactly what is happening to those Serbs who decided to return to the Bosniak and Croat-dominated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In some other cases, as the latest excerpts from above demonstrate, my interviewees were unable to explain why they feel hostility or opposition to other ethnic groups, or they did not feel like they need to find an explanation at all, because this seemed to be accepted as a ‘natural’ or routine way of thinking that came out as a consequence of the experienced armed conflict where different ethnic groups fought on different sides (“I can’t explain why I feel this way, but I just believe that it’s better to stay close to your own people, and to your own religion”; “I simply don’t love them. I don’t know, I guess I am a nationalist”; “I simply don’t like them”; “I have never returned congratulation wishes. I simply can’t”). Through everyday observations and informal conversations with Bijeljina IDPs, I noticed that these negative perceptions on a collective (group) level usually do not reflect negatively on individual relationships between Bijeljina IDPs and members of other ethnic groups, and that none of my interviewees actually acts in accordance with such expressed stances, neither supports any kind of ethnically-motivated violence. However, even if their sense of belonging to their respective ethnic group was expressed through its most positive, passionless, non-violent and “banal” manifestations – as Billig (1995) described them, there is always a danger of transforming these attitudes, or even only people’s fear, into their more emotional and aggressive varieties. Explaining why Serbian nationalism, despite “sporadic examples of ‘banal nationalism’ that resemble Billig’s illustrations” could be perceived as ‘hot’, rather than as ‘banal’, Spasić (2016) noted:

There are plenty of positive, non-violent, easygoing, and friendly manifestations of Serbhood, immersed in the flow of ordinary social life. Yet, they are usually fraught with emotions, and can easily turn into their aggressive varieties. A stable banalization, in the sense of a durable transformation of national referencing into an unemotional automatism, is hardly possible. What looks banal is only provisionally so, and results from a tacit agreement of all concerned not to press the issue at hand—for the moment. And underneath the thin crust of banality there usually lurks a kind of nationalism which, if not outright hot, at any rate is impassioned, resentful, and oversensitive. (Spasić 2016: 41)

While Bijeljina IDPs' gender, age, and urban-rural origin did not make a difference regarding their negative perception of the ethnic other, my interviewees with a higher educational level took a more critical stance towards ethnic animosities and intolerance, as well as a more conciliatory tone while discussing inter-ethnic relations:

All that has happened to me made me appreciate that epithet 'Serbian'. This has been a part of my growing up, of my upbringing. And I love that we are separated in two entities. But it doesn't mean that I think something bad about some other nations; it means that it is nice to have respect for something that is yours, that's all. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Those were indeed some crazy times [*bila su to luda vremena*] when nationalism was flourishing and all that, but, at the same time, you couldn't look at all of them [Muslims and Croats] in the same way. There was always someone who was 'your' Muslim, not the bad one, but *yours*. [...] Given the way I was growing up since the war, since I was 11 years old, it was only understandable that I would hate Muslims. Yet, as you are getting older and more mature, you realize that people can only be classified as good or bad. As you have good and bad people in your own family, that's how it is with Muslims and Croats too. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

In my opinion, all normal, educated people, who think with their own, and not somebody else's head, cannot be making differences between nations. On my Facebook page, I keep in touch with my pre-war Muslim neighbours, friends, colleagues, we communicate in a nice way, congratulate birthdays and religious holidays to each other – there's nothing unusual in it. I am not bothered with this co-existence in Bijeljina either. I keep good relationship with many Muslims in Bijeljina, without any constraints. If I don't wish them bad, and I treat them nicely,

why wouldn't they treat me in the same way? If they do not wish me well, then they are not good people. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Despite this conciliatory tone, it is evident that even these most educated and tolerant interviewees hold somewhat ambiguous stance regarding ethnic co-existence with Bosniaks in Bijeljina, or in Bosnia and Herzegovina more generally. Their narratives are filled with general proclamations (i.e. "people should be seen only as good or bad"; "if someone wishes me well, I wish them well, too") which they might be implementing in real life, but they are also followed by one or more 'buts', whether they refer to enjoying in physical seclusion from other ethnic groups ("I love that we are separated in two entities"), or to accepting as a given that socialisation with the ethnic other comes more as a courtesy and goodwill, than as a natural occurrence ("I am not bothered with their presence. I keep good relationship with many Muslims in Bijeljina, without any constrains"). This shows not only that Bijeljina is still far away from functioning as a true multi-ethnic society, but also that at least one part of its population is still not ready, or is not willing to become ready, to change such state of affairs.

6.2.2. On politics and political participation

As it has been discussed in Chapter 2 concerning the relationship between the local population and newcomers/IDPs throughout post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a widespread belief that IDPs are the most persistent voters of the nationalist parties, which comes as a consequence of their supposed lower education and rural background. Similarly, based on the interviews and informal conversations, there is a general presumption among the local population in Bijeljina that nationalist Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) gets the highest support from Bijeljina's displaced population. However, it seems that the party programme and ideology do not play a central role when it comes to the voting preferences of Bijeljinan IDPs. As will be discussed below, for majority of Bijeljinan IDPs, their electoral preferences are tightly connected with their personal interests and possibility for obtaining financial and other gains.

There were only several of my interviewees, both of urban and rural origin, who admitted that they vote for SDS based on purely ideological reasons. In their

opinion, SDS party is a 'truer' Serbian party than any other, because it was the first Serbian national party that was formed on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, it is the party that was in power during the war, and is therefore responsible for creation of the Republika Srpska and very survival of the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such statements primarily came from some of my interviewees from Sarajevo, who claimed that whole this region, which is also the 'cradle of SDS', shares this very same opinion:

I claim that *izbjeglice* are more loyal to SDS than the locals, for example. When SDS was founded, there was huge propaganda about it, and certain myth about it has remained until this day. And now, people don't care about this party's particular candidates, you could bring them a bear as a mayoral candidate, and they would vote for it, because it is from SDS. That population there from my region around Sarajevo, they have been thought about SDS, and only about SDS, and it is hard to change their stance after all these years. And especially if they can gain some benefit for themselves out of this support. I participated in some electoral processes as a member of electoral commission, and I strongly believe that SDS wouldn't win elections in Semberija if only the locals voted – not even close! [...] *Izbjeglice* do not vote for candidates, they vote for the party. [...] SDS is like a myth for the displaced population from the region of Sarajevo. That myth guides their voting behaviour in the elections. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

A real man [Serb] would think in a way that he should support SDS. It's true that SDS has made so many mistakes, especially its old leadership, and I don't say that they are entirely clean. But it's also true that SDS has created Republika Srpska; there were no other parties back then. [...] I am for SDS. Despite all the mistakes, and all the thieves that came out from this party, I am for SDS. To me, SDS is like a historical fact, and from some normal, human point of view, not acknowledging what this party has done for the Serbs, is like not acknowledging your own name, to say it that way. [...] I think that majority of Serbs from the region of Sarajevo support SDS. SDS was founded in Sarajevo, after all. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

According to the people I keep in touch with, and what I can hear that's happening around me, *izbjeglice* are still loyal to the SDS. They feel that if they

are loyal to the SDS, they somehow remain loyal to Radovan Karadžić⁵², Ratko Mladić⁵³... I think that people think in this way. I think it is because of that history and tradition of SDS. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

We shed so many tears because of SDS. I cannot describe it to the people here in Semberija. Many are judging me because I am for SDS. Maybe this party is not that good for us on a more general level, on the level of Republika Srpska, but I remember that time before displacement, when Muslims and Croats were swearing at me because we had SDS behind us, telling me to leave my city and go to my Serbs... That's why I support SDS, and not because of the people. Because of that idea, of what has happened to me. It is something rooted in me, and I believe it's the same with many, many people, especially a bit older ones. In addition, people feel gratitude towards people who gave them free plots of land, electricity, and drinkable water in our neighbourhood. They were the only ones fighting for our interests back then. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

Regarding this presumption of a widespread support for SDS, especially among the Serb IDPs from the wider region of Sarajevo, I could not draw the same conclusion as my interviewees above. Many of my interlocutors from the same region were actually bitter opponents of the SDS. Also, the official electoral results do not go in line with such a generalisation. Thus, residents of Nova Janja 'refugee settlement' are the only ones who have shown consistency in voting for SDS in both general and local elections, but mostly because several residents of this neighbourhood are prominent party members who, thanks to their political connections and reputation, have managed to secure various infrastructural projects for the benefit of all IDPs in Nova Janja. Nova Janja is also the only 'refugee neighbourhood' where the SDS manages to secure convincing victories over their main political opponent, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). On the other side, residents from some other 'refugee settlements', such as the neighbourhood of Pet Jezera, have been more loyal to SNSD, although this has not been the case with every electoral process, neither for all levels of government (BiH

⁵² Radovan Karadžić was a founder and the first president of the Serbian Democratic Party and the wartime political leader of Bosnian Serbs. In 2016, he was found guilty of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and sentenced to 40 years imprisonment.

⁵³ Ratko Mladić was a Chief of Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska in the Bosnian War of 1992-1995. In 2017, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) convicted Mladić on 10 charges, sentencing him to life imprisonment.

parliament, BiH presidency, RS parliament, RS presidency). Similarly, voting inconsistency is rather a rule than an exception in case of Novi Dvorovi and Kobiljuše 'refugee settlements' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central Election Commission) which, as will be discussed below, could indicate that Bijeljina IDPs care more about concrete benefits politicians offer to their communities in particular electoral processes, than about remaining loyal to their ideological beliefs. Additionally, some of my interlocutors who are long-term members of the two main political parties in Bijeljina stated that, according to their party's internal records, there is no evidence that the party in question is gaining most of its political power exclusively thanks to the votes of a rural, or exclusively thanks to the votes of an urban population group within the local Bijeljina society.

Moreover, an overwhelming majority Bijeljina IDPs think that there is not much difference between political parties in Republika Srpska with regards to their ideological orientation. The two main political parties in Republika Srpska, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), are considered to be very similar in that respect, both being known for their nationalist rhetoric and the occasional threats of the Serb secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina. While openly showing a high level of disappointment in politics and complaining about their inability to change such state of affairs, the most common statements of Bijeljina IDPs were that 'all politicians are the same' or that 'nobody is to be trusted'. This became especially evident during electoral campaign for the local elections in October 2016, when majority of my interviewees talked about a number of irregularities which followed this campaign. These included very blunt 'buying' of votes by all political subjects, blackmails, promises of various concessions in exchange for the vote, and similar. Despite this obvious disappointment, and despite frustration expressed during numerous heated debates I witnessed myself, I rarely got an impression that these people are willing to more actively engage in changing such a practice in their local society. On the contrary, most of them show a high level of apathy and see these obvious frauds as a natural occurrence, while others, being aware that they are incapable of changing things for the better, look for an opportunity to use such situation and turn it into personal gain:

People are like a livestock [*narod je stoka*], used and manipulated by politicians.

It's very easy to manipulate the people. I have never been a member of any

political party, and I have never voted in the elections. Actually, I did vote only one time, because they gave me 150 KM to vote for a specific candidate. If an opportunity arises for selling my vote again, I will do it. It's because politicians are taking everything from me constantly, and the elections are the only day when there is an opportunity for *me* to take something from *them*. [Ivan (47), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

In our *izbjegličko naselje*, we are all mostly voting for SNSD, because they have been responsible for providing all the infrastructure for our neighbourhood. In this way, they've bought our votes. What an ideology? It doesn't exist! Somebody offers you something, does something for you, and then you give them their vote. [...] My neighbour, she became active in one party, because they promised her a job. She was asking me to join her, offering me this and that, but I work a lot, I really didn't have time for that. But now I am thinking that I was crazy not to accept that, maybe now I would be better off if I did. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

With the exception of several of my interviewees quoted above who admitted to being led by their ideological beliefs, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors, regardless of their age, gender, education and rural-urban background, think that political clientelism is widespread in Bijeljina, and that people choose whom to vote for based on their opportunistic desires. In this regard, the way that Bijeljinan IDPs, and Bijeljinan population more generally, perceive politics and political participation, does not represent a novelty, as it does not substantially differ from the positions held by many other Bosnian and Herzegovinians. As some studies pointed out (Čelebičić 2017; Hromadžić 2012; Kurtović 2011, 2017), politics in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is not understood to be about morality, and political loyalty “became imagined as currency” (Kurtović 2017: 143), guided by people's search for better opportunities in life in exchange for their vote. In Bijeljina, my interlocutors admitted to casting vote in order to get employed on certain positions, to preserve certain positions, or to keep good political connections necessary for their private businesses. The poorer population groups in Bijeljina are casting their votes for 20 KM (approximately €10), a sack of flour, or a promise of a more regular social assistance. An interviewee from a newly-built *izbjegličko naselje* explained to me that, throughout the years, they all have been casting their votes based on specific actions that various political parties undertook for

the benefit of their very neighbourhood. In 2012 elections, all the residents expressed their solidarity by voting for SNSD, although the party financed paving of the streets in only one part of the neighbourhood. Now, he said, no matter which political party promises to pave the streets for the rest of the neighbours, he is going to vote for this party in order to return the favour.

My intellect does not allow me to vote neither for those in power, nor for the opposition. They only care about their personal interests. They are blackmailing you, telling you they will find you employment if you vote for them, but in return, you need to find 20 or 30 'secure votes' for that party. After the elections, they forget about you. It's sad. My heart and soul aches when I see some young people investing themselves in politics as it is, truly believing in it. And politicians come to your house with a box of oil, buying your vote, humiliating you. They come in the campaign and promise they will pave the streets in people's neighbourhoods. They bring all the machinery, park in the neighbourhood, show it on TV. After the elections and after they lose, they just move the machinery, without paving the streets. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

There is no more ideology, these politicians, they've killed everything. There are no more new ideas, nobody to offer something new. Even if I say I will form a new party, with young people, I wouldn't be able to gather these young people, because most of them already owe something to some political party. [...] Everything is upside down. People's real quality is not what matters, but to know the right people. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

At the local level particularly, there is no ideology at all. For this candidate, they offer me 30 KM, for some other they offer to pave the street in front of my house, or they give me a sack of cement. The younger ones, they support some parties and try to secure votes for them, because they promised them jobs. [Novak (53), 28 August 2016, Dvorovi]

There is no ideology in who votes for whom. The only rule is that you vote for the one who gives you the most, or promises to give you the most. The people have sold their soul to devil [*narod je prodao dušu đavolu*]. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Furthermore, being the two strongest and the most influential political parties over the years, but also the bitter rivals, SNSD and SDS have created the two opposing blocks

among Bijeljina's electorate. These parties' local leaderships have been using all available strategies in convincing voters to express their loyalty to them. In doing so, they have been strategically choosing those candidates whose qualifications, personal characteristics, influence, but also geographical origins, have potential to persuade targeted groups to cast their vote for this specific party. During the campaign for the local elections in 2016, a number of political parties publically stressed the fact that their candidates for the local assembly are from the category of both local and displaced population in Bijeljina.⁵⁴ They claimed that in this way they are proving that divisions among people based on their place of origin do not exist in Bijeljina society, and that everybody deserves an equal treatment and equal chances for personal development. I find such statements at least partially false, because it would not need to be stressed that divisions do not exist more than 20 years after the new population arrived in Bijeljina, if these divisions are still not felt and discussed in the society. Such a political strategy is legitimate and does not represent a novelty. However, it is important to note that many of my interviewees felt that one of its consequences is that initially created divisions, which came as an inevitable result of a large number of newcomers coming to the town (see Chapter 7), are now being artificially deepened and prolonged:

When political parties are making the list of their candidates for the elections, they are taking into consideration these candidates' origins. They deliberately pick up somebody who was displaced from Sarajevo, for example, so that he can animate all the others who came from Sarajevo to vote for this party. Then you pick somebody from Zenica, and so on. Or, for example, when the parties choose the party's president, especially concerning the party's youth, they pay attention that at least a vice-president is *izbjeglica*. I saw a list of one party in Bijeljina for the local elections, and there was a designation 'I' and designation 'D' written alongside their names – 'I' referring to *izbjeglica*, and 'D' to domicile population. They said how they paid attention that every category of population is equally represented, including displaced and domicile population. I find it unbelievable that some serious politicians make such divisions among the people. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

⁵⁴ See, for example: „Predstavljena lista kandidata 'Uspješne Srpske' za lokalne izbore“, Web portal of the City of Bijeljina, 12 August 2016, av. at: <http://www.gradbijeljina.net/2016/08/12/predstavljena-lista-kandidata-uspjesne-srpske-za-lokalne-izbore/> [accessed 13 March 2018]

I can notice divisions among people in Bijeljina due to the politics. And I believe the politicians make these divisions intentionally. I know some people from my *rodni kraj* who, let's say, have a reputation of some important people in Bijeljina, and who are begged by politicians to join them, so that they can attract other people from the same region. I've also noticed that, when politicians, for example, do their campaign in Novi Dvorovi [refugee settlement], they bring with themselves a man, a potential candidate of that party, who lives in that neighbourhood, who is a part of *izbjeglica* population. That's not a coincidence, they do it strategically. And I believe that people don't really mind being fooled, they enjoy to be 'respected' in that way, they like to say: 'That's good, there is somebody *ours* there in that party'. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Polarisation is visible not only in the sphere of politics, but in public institutions and private businesses too. Bijeljinar IDPs, as well as local population, talk about political corruption, party patronage, and nepotism as a common occurrences in Bijeljina. Social activities and personal success usually depend on 'knowing someone who knows someone else', or finding the right 'connections' [*veze* or *štele*]⁵⁵ (see Brković 2014, 2017a) among Bijeljina's powerful individuals and local government officials. In such a polarised environment, differences between IDPs and local population inevitably arise. For example, if an IDP takes a senior position in a public institution or in a private company, it has become typical that in his recruitment strategies he is going to favour his own circle of trusted people, which are very often those who share the same geographical origins. That is why many of my interviewees complained that IDPs are discriminated as far as public posts in Bijeljinar municipality are concerned, while the locals, for example, were disappointed that presumably none of them could set foot in certain Bijeljinar institutions and companies managed by Bijeljinar IDPs (see Chapter 7). While this competition over power in Bijeljinar society will be discussed in more details in Chapter 7, here it is important to note that many of my interlocutors also believed that even the activities of the associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina, whose primary aim is to preserve the specific region's culture, tradition, and promote socializing among its members and sympathizers (see Chapter 5), have also been politicized and used for satisfying personal interests of a narrow circle of people involved in these associations' founding and sponsorship:

⁵⁵ *Veza* literally means a relation, a connection [plural: *veze*]; *štele* literally means a relation that needs to be fixed [plural: *štele*] (Brković 2017a).

Before the elections, political parties tend to form different associations of displaced persons, because they only care about the displaced population's votes. And these associations and people who form them, they get money for a certain period of time, and after that, they do not have any activities at all. These are some fictitious associations. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

What is generally true for all *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina regardless of the region we came from, is that every association of displaced people has been formed out of some personal interest, because somebody wants to make money out of it. Those 'nights' they organize, it's for maybe five people who participate in the organization, to gain something out of it. It's all business, they all want to make some money. It's only personal interest, whether we talk about money, or something else – maybe they need votes in the elections. And ordinary people, they are 'hungry' for some socializing, they enjoy seeing some people they do not see very often, but somebody always profits out of it. Every association, like every political party, has been formed out of somebody's concrete interest, whether to promote somebody or something, or to earn money. [Ivan (47), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Recently they started forming some associations of displaced people, from Tuzla, for example, or Sarajevo. Honestly, I think it is catastrophic. In this way, they are only putting emphasis on further divisions and seclusions of population. I believe that these associations, like everything else, will be used for some political goals, for political purposes. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

It was already mentioned in Chapter 5 that three out of four main associations of displaced persons in Bijeljina were formed just a year or two before this research was conducted, so it has not been possible to look for certain patterns in the way they organize and implement their activities. Some of them still do not have their own premises, neither sufficient funds for more active engagement in fulfilling their primary objectives. The oldest and the most influential association is the UGPI which represents IDPs from Ilijaš and Sarajevan region more generally. This association is led by some of the richest and most prominent individuals in Bijeljina whose businesses have indeed been promoted through the association's work, and whose wide network of social connections in Bijeljina and beyond has certainly help the association's work. However, according to the way they fund their main activities and the way in which its members

and sympathizers respond to them, it could not be said that the UGPI has been politicized or “used only for some political goals” (excerpt above). It seems that the impression which some of my interviewees have about the associations’ “politicization” stem out from their general distrust in politics, which is seen as making a negative impact on virtually all spheres of social life.

6.2.3. Being a better Serb in Bijeljina

As previously described, being a Serb in Bijeljina (or Bosnia and Herzegovina, more widely) from the point of view of displaced persons in this city, means speaking Serbian language and being of Christian Orthodox religion. Moreover, displaced Serbs in Bijeljina consider the Republika Srpska to be their ethnic homeland, rejecting a more unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina and co-existence with members of other ethnic groups, in relation to which, to a large extent, they maintain negative perception and foster feelings of animosity. Except for developing their sense of ethnic identity in relation to the ‘ethnic other’ (i.e. Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats), Bijeljinan IDPs would also compare their ‘Serb-ness’ [*srpstvo*] with the ‘Serb-ness’ of the local population in Bijeljina, despite the fact that both of these population groups share nominally ‘same’ ethnic identity. In doing so, my interlocutors would usually utilize the concept of ‘nationalism’, or the designation ‘nationalist’, to which they attach more positive meanings, such as being proud to be a Serb and expressing this pride more openly, protecting Serb identity in a more decisive but non-violent manner from inside and outside threats, or being a devoted and an observant believer.

Some of my interlocutors considered IDPs in Bijeljina to be more ‘nationalistic’ than the local Serb population, which, at the same time, means that they are also ‘bigger’ or ‘better’ Serbs. According to my interviewees, the explanation for this argument lies in the fact that, unlike the local Serbs in Bijeljina (see Chapter 4), the IDPs have had an immediate war experience. They felt considerably less safe and more afraid for their lives and properties, they needed to leave their homes, and they have lost all they used to have before the war. Therefore, their wartime traumas and losses, and their shattering displacement experience, make them feel more protective of what is ‘rightfully theirs’ (i.e.

Serbian, including the Orthodox religion), and more antagonistic towards those who are responsible for their pain and losses:

I think that newcomers are somehow bigger nationalists. After all, they are the ones who have been expelled. But in that case too, you can separate between those who've lost somebody in the war, and those who haven't. Also those people who came from smaller local societies, who lived in some kind of ghettos even before the war, and who lived in ethnically pure Serbian villages. [...] I believe that those from villages, they are a bit more radical in their views, they have suffered more in the war, and they are somehow 'defending' more boldly what is theirs. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I think that *izbjeglice* are somehow bigger nationalists [than locals]. They have been uprooted from their homes, they have that bigger sorrow. They needed to leave, they have been cut from their *rodni kraj*. [Tijana (30), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

You are not born to be a nationalist, you are toughed to become one. There is certainly some influence of displacement experience to people's nationalism. Many families, in a very brutal way, have lost their loved ones, and they can't get over it, they can't forget it, and they relationship [towards other ethnic groups] is going to be somewhat different. [...] There has been less of it in Semberija, because there has been less fighting, and less losses. But there where somebody lost their loved ones, there is no difference. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

When I just remember what I have been through, I really hate Muslims, I hate them from the bottom of my heart. And I think that people from Bijeljina, although there was war in Bijeljina too, they didn't really go through the same thing like us. Maybe there were days when they didn't have something to eat, too, but not like us – that your children are crying because you have nothing to feed them with for 15 days, that you are sleeping in some forests under the open sky, that grenades are falling literally three meters away from you, that somebody is trying to shoot you with a sniper... When they came to pick us up from the siege, I remember just how many dead bodies we passed on our way out. All these experiences made me feel like that *srpstvo* [Serb-ness] has become very pronounced in my case. I don't say that people here [in Bijeljina] have not suffered too, but they haven't been expelled, they haven't left their homes, they

haven't gone through that kind of Golgotha like I have. [Bojana (30), 18 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Several of my interviewees also mentioned that men from Bijeljina were less willing to take up the arms and fight in the war, exactly because they did not feel this immediate danger for their lives and properties. As a consequence, Republika Srpska means much less to them both as an idea that needs to be cherished, and as a geographical space that needs to be protected. In addition, many Bijeljinar IDPs accused local Bijeljinar men of war profiteering, i.e. of engaging in smuggling and other illegal activities during the war, thanks to which they could pay their way out from war recruitment (see also Chapter 7). Due to all this, the locals in Bijeljina proved to be 'lesser' Serbs in comparison to Serb IDPs, who have showed more honesty, bravery and decisiveness in protecting the Serb national interests:

Izbjeglice are bigger nationalists than people from Semberija. A lot of people say how *Semberci* did not really fight in the war. I don't know if it is true, but that's what people say, that *izbjeglice* were fighting more. *Semberci*, although they didn't leave their houses, they had something to defend, but still, refugees were more dedicated to that cause. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

A lot of capable men came to Semberija. All three Semberija's brigades were formed when *izbjeglice* arrived, plus three Majevisa's brigades, as well as the special brigade 'Panteri'. All these brigades were formed after *izbjeglice* arrived to Bijeljina, after this population emigrated to Bijeljina. [...] They were formed in September, October of 1992, and *izbjeglice* arrived already in August. [...] Semberija got defended thanks to the displaced population and its soldiers. I highly doubt that Semberija could survive in its entirety, especially in territorial sense, without the displaced population. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

I think that among *izbjeglice* you can find more nationalists. They have been forcibly expelled, and that experience has become a part of them, and they will always more passionately react on certain issues, than maybe those who didn't need to leave their houses. *Semberci*, for example, they were the first to run away when there were some actions during the war, although I don't say that *all* of them did so. I can understand that to some extent. If, for example, I lived in my

village and somebody sent me to Brčko to fight, I probably wouldn't have that feeling of solidarity either. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

In relation to the question of measuring 'Serb-ness' between the local and the displaced population in Bijeljina, although there *is* certain 'quantifying' of ethnic identity among different population groups within one 'same' ethnic group, these differences are not so much emphasized, neither given a lot of attention. This issue was usually not raised by IDPs themselves, but only when I would start this particular conversation topic during our interviews and informal conversations. As both these population groups belong to the 'same' ethnic and religious group, it was presupposed that they would share the same feelings when it comes to their ethnicity, and ethnicity of the others. Although the IDPs' displacement experience has, in certain cases mentioned earlier in this chapter, enhanced their sense of ethno-national belonging, there seem to be no differences between the local and the displaced population in Bijeljina regarding their identification process in relation to the 'ethnic other', especially in their understanding of what it means to be a Serb, their generally negative perception of Muslims/Bosniaks and Croats, as well as their explicit rejection to established more meaningful relationships with ethno-religious groups other than their own.

My observations, informal conversations and interviews with the local Bijeljinar population indicate that the local Serb population defines 'Serb-ness' in the same manner as Bijeljinar IDPs – they stress the importance of practicing the Orthodox Christian religion, they consider the territory of Republika Srpska to be their homeland and reject any ideas of a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they identify themselves through comparison with the same 'ethnic other', i.e. Muslims/Bosniaks and Croats. Religious holidays are widely celebrated by all Serbs in Bijeljina, and, although there is a common opinion that IDPs in Bijeljina are "more religious" than the locals (in a sense that they are more frequent in church and have more respect for fasting practices), to the local Bijeljinar population it is equally important to express their 'Serb-ness' through different religious practices and ceremonies, especially through Christmas, Easter and *slava* celebrations. Entity holidays are also widely celebrated in Bijeljina, whereby 9 January, the day of the Republika Srpska, remains the biggest source of pride for all Serbs in Bijeljina, regardless of their IDPs/locals status. Also, it does not seem that one of these groups is more radical in a political sense, as the local Serb population in Bijeljina shares the stances of Bijeljinar IDPs that there is not much difference

between political parties in Republika Srpska with regards to their ideological orientation. Political preferences of both of these groups of populations are led by their concrete interests and opportunistic desires, rather than some more abstract ideological beliefs.

The local Serb population's stance towards ethnic other largely resembles the stances of Bijeljina IDPs, and it seems that the 1992-1995 war influenced the locals' sense of ethnic belonging in a similar manner as it influenced the sense of belonging of the displaced population. The locals routinely and indisputably believe that, due to the experienced war, different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina should only live *next to* each other, but not *with* each other, and they express satisfaction for living in 'their own' entity, formally secluded from the others. The local population in Bijeljina also uses similar narratives while talking about ethnic co-existence – while they are “not bothered” by Muslims in Bijeljina (excerpts below), they usually do not establish any meaningful relationship with them either. Moreover, just like Bijeljina IDPs, they fear being outnumbered by the members of other ethnic groups in Bijeljina which could presumably lead to another conflict in the future, they believe that Serbs in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are treated worse than Bosniaks in Semberija, and they do not wish to establish any close family relations with the members of other ethnic and religious groups. This is what some of my interviewees from the category of local population stated with regards to these questions:

We didn't want that *suživot* [co-existence], the World has imposed it on us. Up until the war, we lived together, nobody cared who was of what ethnicity, and I can freely say that we lived nicely together. But now, after all this has happened, and a lot of young people lost their lives, a lot of mothers started wearing black, and blood was spilled – the World is still keeping us together... I can only say that, realistically speaking, we can live next to each other, but with each other – no. [Petar (64), 14 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I am not bothered by Muslims in Bijeljina. On a regular basis, I meet and greet some of those Muslims I knew before the war, and I am happy to see them. I always recall those times when we lived together, before the war. I don't know what were they doing during the war, or after the war, we were on the opposite sides. But, personally, although I am not bothered by their presence, I wouldn't like if they were in majority here. Let them be, but a small number of them, only

those who were born here and who love Semberija as much as I do. These should have right to return to Bijeljina. But, I am asking a question: Can a Serb return somewhere where Muslims or Croats are in majority? I doubt it. It's not that I am subjective, but it seems to be that we are more open for them to come here, than they are for us to go there. [Jelena (61), 16 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I am judging this based on the fact that nothing bad happened to me during the war, I didn't lose anyone close. So, I am not bothered by returnees in Bijeljina, absolutely not. I don't have any negative experience with them. Before the war, Muslims were my good friends and colleagues, and today, we always warmly greet each other. But, when it comes to family relations, I was against it even before the war. There is a considerable difference between us. Muslims and Serbs, we have huge national and religious differences. In my house, or even in this local society, a woman with hijab, who does not want to somehow soften her customs and beliefs, she cannot survive in a social sense. We have different prayers, so many different customs and holidays... [Lazar (58), 18 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Therefore, although the very displacement experience has to some extent made an impact on the way Bijeljinan IDPs identify with their respective ethnic group (presumed injustice in the way they were treated by the international community, the authorities in FBiH, their own authorities in RS, etc. – see above), the fact that the local population in Bijeljina does not share the same experience, does not make their ethnic identification process substantially different from the ethnic identification process of Bijeljinan IDPs. In other words, it does not seem that the experience of forcible displacement has made Bijeljinan IDPs more conscious of their ethnic belonging, or 'more nationalistic' compared to their co-ethnics in Bijeljina. Ethnic identifications of both locals and IDPs in Bijeljina are considered to be given, undisputed, routine feelings of belonging which, in my interlocutors' view, did not need to be questioned neither explained. For both of these population groups, the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has intensified their sense of belonging in ethnic terms, as they often base their perception of selves and others precisely on their war experiences, whether they affected their lives in a more direct (IDPs) or indirect way (locals). Also, although the question of who is a 'better' or 'bigger' Serb in Bijeljina *is* being raised, such 'quantifying' of people's 'Serb-ness' is not so much emphasized, neither given a lot of attention in

Bijeljina society. As already mentioned, my interlocutors would engage in these debates only when I would start this particular conversation topic during our conversations and interviews. That is why I presumed that ethnicity, or different 'levels' of it, does not represent the most prominent aspect of Bijeljina IDPs' identification process in the context of this particular local society. Although ethnicity *does* matter, in fact it *greatly matters* to both IDPs and locals in Bijeljina, these two population groups see each other as identical in ethnic terms, so this aspect of their identification process does not constitute the main source of divisions between the locals and the IDPs in Bijeljina.

Gender, age and urban-rural origin do not seem to play a critical role when it comes to Bijeljina IDPs' identification process in relation to the ethnic other, and this applies for the local population too. Male and female IDPs and locals of all generations and of both urban and rural origin seem to be very antagonistic towards the ethnic other, and very much attached to and proud of their own ethnic origins. However, here education plays an important role in a sense that more educated IDPs and locals tend to care less about their ethnic identity and are more willing to establish closer relationship with the Muslim/Bosniak and Croat population in their local society.

This chapter analysed the reasons behind Bijeljina IDPs' decision not to return to their pre-war places of residence, but to resettle at the territory of Bijeljina municipality instead. It has been argued that Bijeljina IDPs' decision not to return has to do with the very characteristics of the Bosnian war, whereby the personal violence between erstwhile neighbours, colleagues and friends transformed the meaning of 'home' for the displaced population, and frightened them into never wishing to return. In addition, Bijeljina IDPs' decision not to return was influenced by the official ideology of their respective ethno-national elites which supported the solidification of ethnically homogenous territories within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as by the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement which insisted on re-establishing the country's ethnic heterogeneity, while, at the same time, proclaiming an ethnic principle in internal organisation and functioning of the country. Given the increased importance of ethno-national identifications since the 1992-1995 war, Bijeljina IDPs took the opportunity to

live in an entity dominated and governed by their co-ethnics, with whom they share common language, religion and culture, and opted not to return to those regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina where they feared that their rights and freedoms would have not been equally guaranteed. Bijeljina IDPs have a strong sense of their ethnic identity which is primarily negotiated in relation to the 'ethnic other' (i.e. Muslims/Bosniaks, and, more rarely, Croats), but it is also, in certain aspects, negotiated in relation to the local Serb population in Bijeljina. Although their displacement experience has, to some extent, enhanced their sense of ethno-national belonging, in the case of the local society of Bijeljina in particular, it does not seem that IDPs could be identified with nationalism and political and religious extremism, any more than the local Serb population of this society could.

The following chapter will address the question of how the internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina have negotiated their identity in relation to the local Bijeljina population, how the notions of selves ('us') and others ('them') have been expressed, and what purpose they served in this particular local setting.

7. The Things That Divide Us: Being a *Seljak* in Bijeljina

7.1. Locals and newcomers in Bijeljina: *Semberci* vs. *izbjeglice*

When those big floods happened in Semberija, I went with a friend of mine, who is *Semberac*, to offer my help in whatever needed to be done to assist the people whose houses and properties were flooded at the time. We gathered in one coffee shop in Bijeljina and were discussing with another man, who offered several of his boats for assistance, which village and which neighbourhoods needed our help the most, so that we go there urgently. And then somebody said how Novi Dvorovi [a refugee settlement] needs our help immediately, because they were endangered the most. But, there was another [local] man there who said: 'No way to go to these *izbjeglice* in Novi Dvorovi, we should first help *our own people!*' [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I work in the field, the nature of my job is to visit different people's houses every day. And they always ask me whether I am an *izbjeglica* or a *Semberac*. Usually some old people ask this question. And I am joking with them, I sometimes even say that my colleague or I are Muslims [laughs]. Generally, there are differences between us. Just like you often end up talking about politics, here too, wherever you go, you end up with the conversation about *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

As it was pointed out in Chapter 5, the experience of forcible displacement has stimulated the emergence of an *izbjeglica* identity, which implies fostering feelings of compassion for other IDPs' suffering and losses, and expressing solidarity and unity in their efforts to overcome all the displacement-induced difficulties in their lives. It has also stimulated the emergence of different regional identities, which, together with IDP's presupposed feelings of solidarity and unity, carry more positive connotations than the label *izbjeglica*. Although they existed in the pre-war period too, these regional identities got renegotiated in the post-war context, especially given their articulation in

the particular local setting analysed in this study. However, apart from defining who we believe we are like, identification process also implies defining who we are unlike. In other words, we do not merely associate ourselves with a set of features that define a social group we believe we belong to – we, at the same time, dissociate ourselves from others. What is more, as Eriksen (2004) notes, identification process is impossible without ‘the other’ we are constantly comparing ourselves to; therefore “without the other, I cannot be myself; without the others, we cannot be us” (159). Explaining social identity as a product of the process of boundary formation between ourselves and others, Barth (1969) furthermore stressed that the existence and persistence of a particular group is dependent upon the existence of other groups and upon maintenance of boundaries between them (see Chapter 2). Thus, it is important to analyse the question of how has *izbjeglica* identity of the displaced group(s) of people in Bijeljina been negotiated in relation to the presence of other group(s). As “social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat” (Bourdieu 1984: 479), in the context of the local Bijeljina society, this is the group of the local Bijeljina population which is very similar to Bijeljina IDPs in a sense of a shared language, religion and ethnicity. While Chapter 5 discussed the perceived *similarities* which exist among Bijeljina IDPs, this chapter will be looking into the identification process which is based on perceived *differences* between nominally similar groups of IDPs and locals in Bijeljina, and single out the most important ‘things that divide’ them, as the title of this chapter states.

In Chapter 5 it was also stressed that local population in Bijeljina uses the word ‘refugees’ [*izbjeglice*] to designate all internally displaced persons in this city, although the term ‘newcomers’ [*oni koji su došli sa strane; pridošlice*] has also been widespread. Majority of Bijeljina IDPs also uses the word *izbjeglice* when they talk about themselves, despite the fact that, legally speaking, they have never been refugees, but internally displaced persons. In some instances, my interlocutors felt that this word is obsolete given the fact that more than two decades have passed since this social category was firstly introduced, and majority of them do not legally have this status anymore. Moreover, while only several of my interlocutors stated that they are proud to be called *izbjeglice*, many of them thought that this word carries derogatory meanings. A large majority of Bijeljina IDPs think that *izbjeglica* is a purely technical term that has neither positive nor negative meanings attached to it (see Chapter 5).

Bijeljina IDPs, on the other side, most usually refer to the local population as *Semberci* [people from Semberija]. In addition, they very often use the term *mještani* [residents, natives, locals], as well as *lokalci* [locals], and, more rarely, *domicilno stanovništvo* [domicile population]. Also, IDPs in Bijeljina use the word *kupusari* [cabbage people] to designate the local population in an offensive and derogatory manner. According to my interlocutors who belong to the category of the local population, every time *izbjeglice* use the word *kupusari*, they are connecting such designated population not only to the land, agriculture, and cabbage as a particular agricultural product, but are actually implying *Semberci's* lack of intelligence, or, more concretely, they are referring to *Semberci's* (cabbage-like) empty-headedness. As the excerpts which open this chapter show, my interlocutors believe that, despite the fact that more than two decades have passed since IDPs arrived to Bijeljina, the relationship between the local population and newcomers, i.e. the relationship between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, is still an important issue in the local Bijeljina society, and widely discussed topic among Bijeljina population in general.

Some *Semberci*, usually referring to the IDPs of rural origin, and being residents of Semberija's rural areas themselves, said that the easiest way to recognize that a person is an IDP is by the way this person walks (as if they are in the mountains; a person walks behind the other one because they are used to walk in narrow mountainous paths), as well as by the clothes this person wears (more traditional clothing). Also, some *Semberci* mentioned that many surnames of Bijeljina *izbjeglice* are different than the typical surnames of the local population – the former usually not ending with the characteristic suffix 'IĆ'.⁵⁶ However, according to the overwhelming majority of my interviewees, both locals and IDPs, local dialects in which people in Bijeljina speak have been the most distinguishable identity markers since displaced people's arrival to this specific region. The spoken dialects –or 'accents' as my interlocutors would usually say– do not only have the capacity to differentiate *Semberci* from *izbjeglice*, but also to make distinction among *izbjeglice* themselves, given the fact that they come from diverse geographical regions where different dialects were spoken, and different slangs were in use. According to my interlocutors, even some characteristic

⁵⁶ For example, my interlocutors would mention the most typical last names of Bijeljina IDPs who originate from the wider region of Sarajevo as: Avlijaš, Rosuljaš, Bilal, Šubat, Duvnjak, Bunjevac, Zupur, etc., while from the region of Bosanska Krajina, these are: Linta, Lugonja, Bokan, Bursać, Štrbac, Radun, etc.

interjections in speech, specific pronunciations of certain words, or use of different loanwords, can be sufficient indicators of somebody's geographical origins:

By the way we speak, by our accents, you could easily say who is from where. There are different interjections we use: 'BA', 'BOLAN' and 'BO'. In Bugojno, we used to say 'BOLAN'. Here in Semberija, people shorten it, and say 'BO'. I started joking with this 'BO' first, and now I am using it, too [laughs]. On the other side, both *Tuzlaci* and *Sarajlije* are saying 'BA'. [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

When I just got a job here in Bijeljina, I was afraid to speak with my colleagues. I couldn't sleep the night before my first day at work. I knew that I had a lot of Turkism in the way I speak. I was saying *amidža* [an uncle, father's brother] and *daidža* [an uncle, mother's brother]. I cannot take it out from my speech. And I also say *amidžić* and *daidžić* for cousins, and people in Semberija say *rođak*. So, I couldn't relax at work, I was paying attention which words I was going to use. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

People from Tuzla, we don't speak like people in Semberija. *Tuzlaci* don't have that rough way of talking... Here [in Bijeljina], the accent is somehow more rough – they somehow shout when they speak. I can really recognize that accent in Semberija easily, they confuse the vowels when they speak [gesticulates certain words]. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

As soon as you start talking with people, you know which region they come from. If they say 'BO', you know they are *Semberci*. *Tuzlaci*, *Ozrenici*, they also have their own specific accents, dialects, you can recognize it. My people from Sarajevo, we, for example, cannot make a difference between the letters 'č' and 'ć', so they recognize us easily, as well. That's our biggest flaw [laughs]. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In that region towards Romanija, for example, people do not confuse the letters 'č' and 'ć'. However, as you go lower down, towards Ilijaš and Visoko, there everything sounds like one letter, either only 'č' or 'ć'. They also confuse 'đ' and 'dž'. When I read some comments on Facebook, for example, I always know who comes from which region. It was probably more noticeable in the 1990s; people have been adjusting their dialects since. Whether they've adjusted it or not, it

depends on their education and their profession, what job they have been doing. It's all individual. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

In the beginning, I could easily differentiate between people based on the way they speak. That region there towards Tuzla, Majevisa and farther away from there, they were confusing the vowels, like 'A' and 'O', saying something in between [gesticulates]. To me, *Semberci* sounded like they were singing. As if they were not talking, but singing – the speech was somehow light and musical [gesticulates]. *Krajišnici*, a bit more roughly [gesticulates]. And those down there from Sarajevo, like *šibicari* [swindlers, tricksters] [gesticulates]. So, I could easily say who is who here. Today, we are accepting some things from each other, including the way we speak. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In the last two excerpts, my interviewees mentioned that different dialects spoken in Bijeljina since the 1992-1995 armed conflict, have the capacity to slowly cease to represent the most distinguishable markers of one's origins, as different population groups in Bijeljina have been "accepting some things from each other" and "adjusting" their verbal articulation accordingly. Nevertheless, there were also those interviewees, locals and IDPs alike, who expressed their discontent because different dialects could still be heard in today's Bijeljina, more than 20 years since the newcomers arrived to this city and decided to make it their permanent residence. For some of my interviewees, who mockingly mimicked the way people from different regions speak, the existence of these 'accents' in everyday speech is considered to be backward, almost 'uncivilised', and it very often got connected to a person's rural origins. My interlocutors showed especially negative attitude towards the dialects and slangs in Semberija, as well as to those that have origin in Sarajevo and wider Sarajevo region:

The speaking of people here in Semberija, the way they talk, it irritates me a bit. Not only that there is that specific accent, it doesn't matter that much, but all those grammatical errors, the wrong grammatical expressions they are using... For example, when they say *rato*, instead of *rat* [war]. Or *kuruz*, instead of *kukuruz* [corn], *kompir* instead of *krompir* [potatoes]. I cannot understand that people could be talking in this way. I don't blame people from the countryside who are not educated and all that, but it is strange to hear those more educated to speak in this way. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

It was maybe ten years ago when a policeman stopped my car and asked for my documents. He was maybe 20 years old. He said to me: *Dobro večer* [good evening] [gesticulates a dialect specific for the region of Sarajevo]. As this *dobro večer* went out from his mouth, my stomach turned upside down, and I needed to ask him where is he from. I couldn't get it, *why* he needs to speak in this way. I don't know any 'real' *Sarajlija* who is talking like that. Maybe he came from some rural areas but wanted to sound like he is not, I don't know. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

When *Sarajlije* speak, every third word they use is *jarane* [friend, pal, buddy]. When I came to Bijeljina, I was probably not speaking correctly. For example, I was saying *goram* for *gore* [up] or *dolam* for *dole* [down]. But through school and education, I have worked on myself, I've tried to make myself better, so that I am not a *seljak* [peasant] or I don't know what. A real city-dweller from Sarajevo would never say *jarane* or use the interjection 'BA'. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

As it will be discussed below, the Sarajevan dialect is connected to the distinguished identity of Sarajevan IDPs in Bijeljina, which, for most of my interviewees, presupposes their arrogance and a superior attitude towards other IDPs, and especially towards the local population. Thus, as the case of *Sarajlije* illustrates, various dialects spoken in Bijeljina do not only represent the markers indicating somebody's geographical origins, but are also used to designate different cultural and personality traits that are presumably characterizing all people who originate from the same geographical region. In the local society of Bijeljina, the attribution of these usually negative personality traits which are over-generalized and attached to the entire groups of people, have its roots in the competition over principal sources of power available in this particular local society, as well as in perceived cultural differences between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, and among different groups of *izbjeglice* themselves.

7.1.1. Competition over scarce resources

My interlocutors have had very diverse experiences when it comes to their relationship with the local population in Bijeljina immediately after their arrival to this city in the

early 1990s. While many of them praised *Semberci* for different generous acts towards the incoming population – from providing shelter and food for displaced families, to offering them employment and financial help in dealing with their predicament, others complained about being used for cheap labour by the local agriculturalists, or deceived into buying overpriced plots of land after deciding to resettle in Bijeljina. Many of my interlocutors tended to believe that in their early displacement period in Bijeljina, there were many locals who perceived the newcomers to their city as poor and wretched people, and took advantage of their misfortune. Here is how some of my interlocutors recalled their first encounter with the local population in Bijeljina, which primarily refers to the latter group's perception of the newcomers in their city as poor and miserable people:

In the very beginning of our displacement, usually those a bit older generations had more problems in adjusting to the new society. There was that clash of different mentalities between the locals and the newcomers. I remember how back then there were those coffee bars in the city where only *Tuzlaci* would go out, then some where only *Sarajlije* would go out, and then you had those where only *Semberci* went. I was a bit younger, and in my case, I was actually growing up with them [the locals], we met as children, basically. We would fight from time to time, but nothing serious. Like, we would get angry and call them *kupusari*, and they would get angry and call us *izbjeglice*. But in my generation, these divisions were not as emphasized as it was the case with those a bit older than myself. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I adjust easily wherever I go. And I don't classify people into any other category, but 'good' and 'bad'. And there are good and bad people everywhere. But it's not like you cannot hear other people commenting. When my wife and I just arrived to Bijeljina, we stayed with our relatives for some time, but then we were looking for some other accommodation for us. And we heard local people commenting how, when we came to their neighbourhood, they thought we were some gypsies. They didn't know that we had everything there where we lived, and that we left it all. But people got this impression because there were so many *izbjeglice* who were poor, who came with nothing, who lived in some barracks because they didn't have any other place to stay. Until we managed to make it here [*da se snađemo*], of course that we all had looked like some homeless

people. But there were not many evil people, *Semberci* accepted us really well. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

When we came here and I started the school, they perceived me as if I was some lower race, some lower class. It has indeed happened. There were also many normal people, who criticized such behaviour, but there were also those who treated me like some *došljo* [newcomer, pejoratively], like if I was some miserable person... Maybe it was more like that in schools, you know how it is among the children in general – they can be very judgemental... [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

While many of my interlocutors had only positive experiences with the locals, and the feelings expressed in the excerpts above are by no means the rule, it is true that in Bijeljina IDPs' early displacement period, it was the locals who possessed more power in their hands, and considered themselves superior in relation to the newcomers to their city. And, as it was pointed out by Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) in their study on Winston Parva, when one group is considered to be inferior in power, it is very often considered inferior in nature, too. In other words, power inferiority can very often be perceived as a sign of human inferiority. In the case of Bijeljina, this is best illustrated in a story I have heard from one of my interlocutors from Bijeljina, and which supposedly took place in the early period of IDPs' life in this city. According to this story, a man (an IDP) visits his friend (a fellow villager and a local man), but does not find him in the yard so he asks the friend's wife to look for him. Loudly calling her husband, she says: "Can you come here, *a man* is looking for you". After coming and recognizing his friend, the local man makes a joke by addressing his wife: "You said *a man* was looking for me, but I see no man here, only *izbjeglica*" [*ti reče neki čovjek me traži, ali ja ne vidim čovjeka ovdje, samo izbjeglicu*].

As already mentioned in Chapter 5, during the early displacement period, *izbjeglice* and *Semberci* were not given much opportunity for mutual interaction and cooperation. Bijeljina IDPs used to share the same neighbourhoods, attend the same schools, and engage in the same economic activities, which had kept them somewhat separated from the local population, and built the reputation of people who tend to stick together and prefer to maintain close relationship mostly with their fellow IDPs. Moreover, older generations of Bijeljina IDPs, i.e. those who, as they say, were already 'formed as individuals' when the war broke out, have had more difficulties in their

efforts to expand their social networks and adjust to the new physical and social environment. Also, primarily due to their spatial segregation, the IDPs who settled in Semberija's countryside mostly established only superficial relationship with their co-villages who belong to the category of domicile population. On the other side, although at first some of them experienced discrimination in schools or kept their social life secluded from their peers in Semberija (excerpts above), younger generations have relatively quickly overcome the initial constraints in communication between the locals and the newcomers in Bijeljina.

For many of my interlocutors, the period in which Bijeljina IDPs decided to settle down in Bijeljina, building entire 'refugee neighbourhoods' and looking for a more permanent employment positions and long-term business projects, represented a turning point in their relationship with the local population. From this period on, majority of Bijeljina's *izbjeglice* could not any longer be associated with poverty and hopelessness, and they began to represent a threat to the power relations in the local society, which had been in effect up to that point. The aforementioned study of Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) stressed that the power of the established group (i.e. the local population) to stigmatise diminishes or goes into reverse gear when this group is no longer able to maintain its monopoly over the principal resources of power available in a given society. In other words, when the uneven balance of power created upon newcomers' arrival to a particular society diminishes, the outsiders (i.e. the newcomers) tend to retaliate and they resort to counter-stigmatisation. This power shift within the local Bijeljina society could be illustrated by another humorous comment I have heard from my interlocutors, but this time it has been created and employed by Bijeljina IDPs. When trying to solve a dispute among themselves and find a common ground, or when attempting to stress some of their human virtues or simply their power (and human) superiority in relation to the local population, Bijeljina IDPs would very often say: "We are *humans*, we are not *Semberci*" [*ljudi smo, nismo Semberci*]. More concretely, this period of power shift marked the point after which *Semberci* started being seen through the prism of different unflattering personality traits, including their maliciousness, resentfulness, and jealousy because of Bijeljina IDPs' ability to find the means to stand on their own two feet, which, similarly to what Dragojević (2010) observed in the case of Serb refugees from Croatia and their hosts in Serbia, seemed as being accomplished more easily and more successfully than it was the case with many local families:

It's an ugly business to categorize people as this and that, to divide them. It's not nice to hear it, but this has always been the case. Even before the war, there were always some divisions. I don't know if you know, but Bijeljina Muslims were also making difference between those who came to Bijeljina from someplace else – Srebrenica or I don't know which other region, and those who were locals. There was that gap between them, too, and it remains present among people. Because, in that initial period of sadness and misery, nobody is bothered by a newcomer, and they even help them. But people then become bothered by somebody's success. They blame other people for their dissatisfaction and failures, or they search for justification, for some explanation for their dissatisfaction, in somebody else's success, without asking *how* this man managed to make something for himself. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

You know, many *Semberci* feel endangered by *izbjeglice* in this city, because there are many *izbjeglice* who have done well for themselves [*dobro su se snašli*] and who live better today than most of the local people do. There has been a lot of *šverc* and other illegal activities, because the authorities let these people do whatever they wanted for some time, until they managed to get on their own two feet. After some ten or twelve years, the authorities put an end to this practice, and then, some people got out of it doing well for themselves, while many others didn't. But then some locals who have always lived in this city and they cannot find employment for their children, they are angry because some *izbjeglice* have nice jobs and all that. But it's not my fault; I have been working hard for ten years to get to where I am right now, and his children were probably just too lazy to do the same thing for themselves. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Semberci tend to say how somebody came to their city and started treating them with superiority. Like: 'They came to my territory and they started ordering me what to do'. But these people were educated, and they got employed [in Bijeljina] in accordance with their education. But there is that jealousy, that way of thinking how I was born somewhere, so how can somebody come here and tell me what to do? [...] There is also jealousy between *izbjeglice* themselves, among those who made it and those who didn't [*nisu se snašli*]. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

We have all managed to make it in Bijeljina [*snašli smo se*]. Look at my house – it is an indicator of how an average *izbjeglica* has managed to make it in Bijeljina.

And *Semberci*, sometimes we could hear them saying: 'Look at these *izbjeglice*, they all have built *new* houses for themselves!' And then we would say: 'Well, of course we've built *new* houses, how can we build *old* ones, when we are building them from the scratch?!' [laughs]. Or, for example, one good friend of our family, a man who is *Semberac*, he admitted after years of our friendship how, when we just came to Bijeljina, he thought that we came with a stolen tractor. And it was *our* tractor, the only thing we managed to take with us from our *rodni kraj*. One friend of mine used to say: 'Now, *Semberci* don't like us, *izbjeglice*, but when they were selling to us plots of land for five or six thousand marks, then we were good to them!' [laughs] [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

Contrary to the relationship between locals and newcomers in Sri Lanka (Brun 2003) and Indonesia (Duncan 2005) who competed for tangible economic assets – such as land and humanitarian aid, but similarly to such relationship in Croatian village of Gradina (Čapo-Žmegač 2007), in contemporary Bijeljina the power is primarily derived from the monopoly over key positions in political parties, and, subsequently, in local institutions and organisations, too. This monopoly enables people to become directly involved in the policy- and decision-making processes, and gives them the capacity to control appointments to office or the right to privileges. Connecting politics to almost limitless power is not characteristic for Bijeljina society only; political opportunism, corruption and nepotism are widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where individuals look to improve their and their family's material position and reputation through their involvement in the work of the strongest political parties (Čelebičić 2017; Hromadžić 2012; Kurtović 2011, 2017) (see also Chapter 6). In this context, my interlocutors believed that *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina are underrepresented in the local municipality's legislative and executive bodies, as well as in different local institutions and organisations. On the other side, the locals either negate this statement, or believe that Bijeljina IDPs might indeed not have many representatives in the local government, but they are, due to their wealth, influence, and interconnectedness with political structures, largely impacting the local policymaking, empowering themselves to practically rule from the shadows.

While it is hard to evaluate these claims through precise quantitative data, it can nevertheless be said that both of these groups tend to understate their place in the local Bijeljina political and social hierarchy. It can indeed be true that, until relatively

recently, there have not been many IDPs in Bijeljina's main legislative and executive bodies, but this does not need to be explained through local population's deliberate attempt to keep Bijeljina IDPs excluded. Many of my interlocutors passionately believed that they have been overshadowed by the locals in the sphere of politics, but when asked why have not they done anything to change such state of affairs, they justified their inactivity by their preoccupation with issues which were more important and more urgent than their active involvement in political competition (i.e. solving property rights in FBiH, working and saving for new accommodation, building new houses, etc.). Even today, *Semberci* seem to be slightly overrepresented in these bodies, but this again is not a proof of their intention to keep IDPs out from the policy- and decision- making processes. As one of my interviewees observed (below), another explanation can be that it has been harder for *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina to obtain more political power than *Semberci*, because it has also been harder for them to develop a community life on their own, as they are strangers not only to the locals, but to each other, as well. *Izbjeglice* in Bijeljina who originate from diverse regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have developed different, sometimes even opposing, regional identities (see Chapter 5), which in the power competition at the local level usually matter more than their common *izbjeglica* identity:

The locals see whole that population as *izbjeglice*, but look at this neighbourhood of mine with 50 households – you have people from Ozren, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica. For the locals, we are all seen as one. But, if one man from Sarajevo runs for the office in the local government, to lead this entire city, to govern it better than those who lead it now, he would not have the electorate to support him. Even if *all izbjeglice* voted for him, he wouldn't be able to win. [...] Even if there was 50 per cent of *Semberci* and 50 per cent of *izbjeglice* in this city, *Semberci* would outvote us, because we are not one and the same population group, we are a mixture of different groups. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Nevertheless, in the recent years, the things have positively changed for IDPs in Bijeljina. A newcomer to Bijeljina is a president of a local branch of one of the two strongest political parties in the Republika Srpska, while many prominent members of the two main parties in Bijeljina (SDS and SNSD), as well as their largest sponsors, are from the category of IDPs. It is impossible to find an institution or organisation which has its doors closed for IDPs, while in some of them –such as Bijeljina's police– it could be said

that IDPs are more numerous managers and employees than the local population, as IDPs' dominance in this institution was established already during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see below)⁵⁷. Therefore, the stances of both IDPs and locals with regards to their place in the competition for power in the local Bijeljina society are grounded more in what they perceive this place to be, than what it actually is. In other words, the social boundaries which are in this way created between IDPs and locals in Bijeljina exist "in the minds of their beholders" (Cohen 2001: 12), but this, however, does not make them less real. According to majority of my interlocutors from the category of Bijeljina IDPs, due to perceived power inequalities in the local Bijeljina society, the boundaries have persisted between 'us' – whose voice is prevented from being heard, and 'them' – who have unrightfully taken control over everything:

I think that people who came to Bijeljina from someplace else, are right about one thing. There are, I believe, around 22 to 23 thousand displaced persons in Bijeljina today, or, let's say, one quarter of Bijeljina's total population. What I notice that people complain about is that there is a low participation of displaced persons, regardless of the region they come from, in the social and political life of this society. Almost negligible. From my region of Sarajevo, for example, until the latest elections when one of our people entered into the municipality's executive board, there were no people involved in the local government from that region. Neither in the local assembly, neither in its executive bodies. Some of them were involved in the work of certain political parties, but if you have, let's say, 30 people in the party's leadership, there are maybe only five of them who came to Bijeljina from someplace else. And those 5 will always manage to get things their way. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

We cannot speak about the participation of *izbjeglice* in the local government. I have been involved in Bijeljina's association of war invalids, representing 2,223 war invalids who live in this municipality. But I left it because of the politics. And let me tell you, *izbjeglica* cannot become the president of this association. I am saying this with full confidence. They would just never let that happen. [...] The assembly of this association has 63 members and 50 of them are from the

⁵⁷ The former commander of the public security station in Bijeljina stressed that at the time when he left this institution in mid-2000s, there were 200 employed policemen, 128 of whom were from the category of IDPs. He also estimated that only 20-30 per cent of the total number of police inspectors were from the category of local population (Interview with the wartime commander of the public security station in Bijeljina, 18 August 2016, Bijeljina)

category of domicile population, so *izbjeglice* are always outvoted. But now, as the elections are coming, we should make an ultimatum before we offer our support to the party which finances us – four years a local man should have the mandate over the association, and then four years an *izbjeglica*.

MM: Why do you think this discrimination exists?

Well, I guess that many displaced persons are educated people. Maybe they see them as a competition and are afraid that they would take control over things. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

I very often hear *izbjeglice* saying how there are no many of us in the government, and how mostly *Semberci* hold those important positions. They would say: 'It doesn't matter that we have been here for years and that we have built different firms and businesses' – it is true that many newcomers are indeed very successful businessmen, 'we can be successful privately, but not really hold any power in our hands'. It is really difficult, I would say even impossible, for a newcomer to be in the local government. It really is the truth. Maybe for a long time, we haven't even had time for that, we have been preoccupied with the problems of our survival. I know that it is always almost a sensational news when one of *our men* gets into government. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The power in Bijeljina is also acquired from greater cohesion and solidarity within the specific group of people, which can, among other, be determined by the shared regional identities of the members of this group. This is primarily manifested through empowering people to create and utilize different social connections [*veze* or *štele*] which can serve the role of reproducing social personhoods and increasing one's influence and power (Brković 2017a). From the point of view of social capital studies in post-socialist societies in general, and the Serbian one in particular (see Cvetičanin 2012; Cvetičanin and Popescu 2011), using personal networks and informal contacts for one's material and other benefits, represents one of the most important aspects of a person's social capital, that, in certain periods of the crisis of the state, represents the only capital worth owning. In contemporary Bijeljina, as it was mentioned in Chapter 6, being connected to powerful individuals or local government officials, and using the informal exchanges of favours based on kinship or/and friendship networks, means being able to achieve better personal and professional development. As Brković (2014;

2014a; 2017a) found out, having rich social networks, i.e. getting to know as many people as possible in the hope of meeting the 'right' people along the way, was the key 'tool' of the humanitarian actions in Bijeljina that secured very survival of the people seeking for financial help for different medical treatments. The local population's notion that *izbjeglice* tend to stick together is related to their conviction that such strong social connectedness could secure more power and more influence in the hands of Bijeljinan IDPs. Bijeljinan IDPs, on the other side, believe that the local population's presumed monopoly over different government positions offers them more space to make use of political connections for their own benefit. Many of my interlocutors acknowledged the importance of *veze* or *štele* in Bijeljina which take regional identities as their primary basis, and which both the locals and the IDPs in this city extensively take advantage of:

Municipality is treated like hereditary property of *Semberci*. Look at the mayoral position, and all the executive positions. Whatever is important, it is held by *Semberci*. I haven't noticed that there has been animosity among *izbjeglice* towards that fact, it is not like they are talking about it constantly. But when there are elections or something, then people maybe start mentioning this. They are saying, in a sense, how there are no *izbjeglice* on any positions where some major things are to be decided. Although, truth to be told, when it comes to these positions in the municipality and other municipality institutions, more important are family and other connections, that who is a *Semberac* and who is an *izbjeglica*. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

In ORAO⁵⁸, only *Sarajlije* have been employed, although since recently, they started employing people from other regions, too. You know why? It is because Semberija is an agricultural region and they don't have educated engineers and experts who could work there. But *Sarajlije* do. And they help each other a lot. [Milica (34), 15 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The real fight over power in Bijeljina is about to begin, I mean the fight over appointments to powerful positions in the municipality. The fight between the domicile and the displaced population. Twenty years we have been waiting for that. If you look at the executive branch of power, all the sectors have been

⁵⁸ ORAO is a Joint Stock Company in ownership of the Government of Republika Srpska, which main activity includes production and overhaul of turbo jet engines of all kinds. When Serbs from the wider region of Sarajevo left their homes in February and March 1996, this company, with its headquarters in Rajlovac (Sarajevo), was relocated to Bijeljina, following the relocation of its management and other employees.

governed by *Semberci*. I know for only one director who wasn't *Semberac*, and it was long time ago when he held this position. Although, on the other side, it is also true that in some institutions you have only *izbjeglice*, too. Like in the Ministry of the Interior and in the police. Because these people, they all came from the [police] centre in Pale, mostly some educated *Sarajlije*. They sent them to Bijeljina to fill in the managing positions in police already during the war, and of course that they would bring some other *Sarajlije* to be their close associates and employees. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

Just like their stance with regards to monopoly over key political positions in the local Bijeljina society, the locals' and the IDPs' conviction that the other group seems more cohesive and more capable of utilizing *veze/štele* through dense network of political and social connections, is largely product of their subjective perception. As discussed in Chapter 6, using informal exchanges of favours based on kinship or/and friendship networks is widespread in Bijeljina and, even though it indeed tends to bring closer together individuals with the same regional identification, it could not necessarily be translated into 'locals vs. newcomers' relationship. While majority of my interviewees held more rigid stances concerning the question of power relations in the local Bijeljina society, whereby 'us', as a rule, was unwillingly put in an inferior position in relation to 'them', there were also some Bijeljina IDPs, usually younger and higher educated interviewees, who had a more flexible or critical understanding of this particular issue. Although attaching such straightforward explanations for presumed power inequalities seems tempting at times (excerpt below), these interviewees also believed that utilizing *veze/štele* has not been an exclusive characteristic of the local society in Bijeljina, and it has not undoubtedly been directed to only benefit the 'other' at the expense of 'us':

For example, let's use my own case – I was working in Telekom, I was really diligent and they promised to give me a permanent contract. But I didn't have anybody there from my *rodni kraj* and they didn't give me the contract after all. Then, I started thinking –it just crosses your mind, you know– how the director is *Semberac* and maybe that's why I didn't get the job. I can't say it didn't cross my mind. But then I realized that in Telekom mostly *Tuzlaci* are employed, and they were all helping each other to get employed there, too. They stick together. *Tuzlaci* and *Semberci* were the most numerous employees there. It has become a source of joke, you know. I work with many *Semberci*, and whenever something that I don't like happens, I say: 'Are you doing this to me only because I am a poor

izbjeglica? Or: 'Are you discriminating me on purpose, just because I am an *izbjeglica*?' [laughs] [Davor (33), 30 September 2016, Bijeljina]

I believe that *izbjeglice* can find a job in Bijeljina more easily than the native population. Do you know how many *izbjeglice* have come to Bijeljina? So many. And so many local businesses in Bijeljina are led by *izbjeglice*. I remember one friend of mine from Semberija saying: 'Didn't we have someone from our own population to open this-and-that business? Didn't we know to do it ourselves before *izbjeglice* came?' I have a feeling like there are more *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina than locals. Maybe because they stick together a lot [*drže se zajedno*]. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In my opinion, it's normal that *Semberci* would support the idea that somebody theirs is a mayor, for example. It sounds logical to me. Take a look at the firm that I work for – we started employing some people from Serbia, because we do not have enough educated cadre in Bijeljina with expertise we specifically look for. So some people from Serbia started coming and working for us, and I could notice us all commenting on them, how they came and pretend to be better and smarter than us. And then I just applied this situation to the situation when we came to Bijeljina, when the local population was probably thinking in this very same way. Or when I went to the university. There I had many colleagues coming from Vlasenica, Milići, and Rogatica⁵⁹, who were really working hard and doing whatever was in their power to stay here in Bijeljina, to succeed in something. And I was living here, and I didn't invest myself in it as much. And they all got really good jobs, just because they were fighting for themselves. That's the same with us, when we came like poor *izbjeglice*, we were coping to survive the best we could, while *Semberci* were already here, and they didn't need to face the same challenges like we did. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

People have translated everything into that relationship 'locals vs. newcomers'. Newcomers would say: 'Look at these *Semberci*, that haven't lost anything, they have everything, and they want all the power, too! And me, I came with one bag in my hands, I needed to provide the land for my family, a house, to find a job, and still, I am nowhere to be seen!' [...] This existed before, and it exists today, too. One whole generation, *our* generation, will need to pass and go, so that these

⁵⁹ Vlasenica, Milići and Rogatica are small municipalities in eastern Republika Srpska (population of 11,467, 11,441 and 10,723, respectively) (Population Census 2013).

things change. Youngsters – they see and understand things differently and they socialize among themselves way more than us, the elderly. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

7.1.2. *Sarajlije* in Bijeljina

Most of my interviewees, both IDPs and locals, think that IDPs from Sarajevo tend to stick together and socialize among themselves much more than IDPs who came to Bijeljina from some other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Chapter 5 it has been discussed that activities of the association of IDPs originating from the wider region of Sarajevo greatly contribute to such public image. While many of my interviewees admired this characteristic, at the same time they believed that it has been creating unnecessary divisions in the local society, even more so because they have an impression that *Sarajlije* intentionally aim at keeping themselves segregated from the rest of the Bijeljina population.

My interviewees who belong to the category of displaced population largely believed that *Sarajlije* have been in a much better socio-economic position since displacement, in comparison to other IDPs' displacement and post-displacement experiences. This is because most of *Sarajlije* –especially those who do not originate from Sarajevo proper but from different Sarajevo municipalities– left their homes after the war ended, so they had the opportunity to sell or completely transport their material possessions, bring higher financial capital with themselves, and more freely choose where to resettle within the borders of the Republika Srpska. In majority of cases, IDPs from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina left their homes in an unplanned and sudden way because of an immediate danger for their lives, usually carrying only their most basic belongings, and without having a clear plan where shall they go, except that it should be someplace safe. In combination with this factor, IDPs in Bijeljina believed that either due to *Sarajlije's* presumed higher education, their specific mentality, or their illegal wartime activities (see below), this population group in Bijeljina, unlike many other groups of displaced persons, have managed to do well for themselves in terms of their economic strength and political power:

A kind of social chaos has happened here... People who have solved the problem concerning their properties in FBiH are doing fine, and they don't call themselves *izbjeglica* anymore, they are not interested in what's happening in FBiH. They have children abroad, sending them money, or they sold their properties for a very good money. For example, people from Sarajevo, they've sold their properties to Arabs and they say that they are not *izbjeglice* any longer. One segment of that population has infiltrated into local political structures and got into power. They've got everything from the local government to keep quiet. They've gotten employment for their family and themselves, they've built houses... They have high political ambitions, but don't have compassion for those who don't have as much as they do. [Uroš (66), 14 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Sarajevo was a big city, and many *Sarajlije* were educated people. Wherever they moved after the war, they were looking for some good posts, good professional positions. After they were getting these positions, it was logical that they would start employing many their relatives and friends, as well. And they tend to stick together [*drže se zajedno*]. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

It could be said that such perceived characteristics and presumed socio-economic status of *Sarajlije* has created a certain inferiority complex of other IDPs, and especially of Bijeljina's local population. Interviewed *Sarajlije* certainly thought so, but not even IDPs from other regions, neither the local population, tried to completely reject this statement. Sarajevo is the largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the greatest urban centre. Even those Sarajevo municipalities where most of Bijeljina's IDPs came from, are very much oriented towards the city itself. Population from Ilijaš, Rajlovac, Vogošća and Visoko was usually well-educated and employed in the industrial sector, or they used to be very skilled tradesmen and craftsmen. In pre-war Bijeljina such positions were mostly reserved for the local Bosniak population, while considerable number of local Serbs was predominantly engaged in agriculture and animal breeding. When during the war large majority of Bosniak population was expelled or they left Bijeljina, *Sarajlije* took their place, spreading their influence to the local government's bodies, agencies, successful companies, and police. In this case, it is the knowledge, skills and urban outlook of *Sarajlije* that made the locals and the IDPs from other regions feel as if they were in an inferior position compared to their co-ethnics from Sarajevo. Many of my interlocutors originating from Sarajevo openly expressed their superior stance in

relation to the rest of the Bijeljina population, which ranged from the view that *Sarajlije* have been responsible for this society's economic, social and cultural advancement, to giving *Sarajlije* an exclusive credit for improving the 'genetic code' of Semberija:

The generation of our parents, they sometimes make these differences between the people. And it is always that we are the best, and all the others... well, we attach some negative characteristics to them. *Semberci* are like this and that, *Krajišnici*, from the other side, something else, but we are always the best. Our people who came here from Sarajevo, they tend to say how Bijeljina got reborn since they arrived to this city, and how Bijeljina was nothing but a village before their arrival. Now, it has been built, it has become prettier thanks to us. [...] We are generally attaching some labels to each other. When people talk to us, and mention the word *izbjeglica*, you can see that they are trying to avoid that word, not to offend us. But we are proud to be *izbjeglice*. We came from the society which was bigger, more urban and more advanced than Bijeljina was at the time, so, as far as my family is concerned, we say with pride that we came to Bijeljina as *izbjeglice* from Sarajevo. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

People from different regions came here in Bijeljina. And every region has its specifics: from culture and customs, to some intelligence and genetics. Before we came, there was only one type of genetic code in this region. And after we came from Sarajevo, I am telling you, we surely contributed to the overall development of this society. Surely. In every society, they accept and assimilate some newcomers to improve their genetics. It's called imputing new, fresh blood in the society. [...] I think that Semberija only benefited from our arrival. And it could benefit even more... [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I cannot say that I am *Semberac*, neither do I want to say something like that. I live in Bijeljina, yes, but I am not *Semberac*. The fact is that the level of civilization was higher among us from Sarajevo. You can see and feel it. There are exceptions, of course, but this is the fact. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

However, this is only partially explaining certain animosity that exists between *Sarajlije* and the rest of the Bijeljina population. Many of my interlocutors, especially the local population, believed that *Sarajlije* possess power and influence like no other population group in Bijeljina thanks to their illegal and disgraceful conducts during the war, which

most of all included their smuggling activities. Smuggling of various goods, such as cigarettes, alcohol, fuel and cars, was flourishing at the time due to Bijeljina's immediate proximity to the national borders. In the summer of 1993, *SIM Novine* (17-18/1993) wrote about Bijeljina –or “Serbian Hong Kong” as the author called it– as “the strongest and the most alive city in Republika Srpska in terms of its economic activities”. Those individuals who came to Bijeljina as internally displaced persons were singled out as the most successful businessmen who registered as many as 200 firms in this city, and who proved to be very effective in smuggling fuel, cigarettes, and other goods “which have been coming to Semberija through unknown channels”. The author especially emphasized that wartime Bijeljina has given rise to various “sheikhs” in this city, or businessmen who dealt with fuel trade, whose wealth at the time could be measured in millions of marks.⁶⁰ Bijeljina had kept this reputation throughout the entire war. Here is how the then president of Bijeljina's executive board addressed this question in an issue of *SIM Novine*, just several months before the end of the war (38/1995):

They are trying to discredit *Semberci*, saying that we are profiteers and weak soldiers, using all sort of ugly words to characterize us. [...] *Semberci* are not neither lesser nor greater profiteers than any other population group present in this region. The public needs to know that there are 30,000 displaced persons in this city. They have lost a lot, they have lost their homes, and it is very difficult to speak of everything they have been through... Nevertheless, we have to also speak of those newcomers in Bijeljina who used this war to get rich, to open private businesses and firms – everybody is forgetting to speak about these people. [...] I understand those who came from the enemy-controlled territories. There is no life for them there, and these people have had enormous losses, so our country and this local society, we have to help these people. [...] But problem are those who obtained a lot of wealth while this country was still not properly functioning, and, for the reasons well-known to them, left the free, Serb-held territories and came here to Bijeljina. We are talking about some privileged groups of people, with various connections and strings. As such, they

⁶⁰ *SIM Novine* frequently wrote about smuggling and other criminal activities in wartime Bijeljina, participation of incoming population in these activities, and power competition between the local government in Bijeljina and the Ministry of Interior, which headquarters were in Bijeljina during the war, and which was led by individuals from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (mostly Sarajevo) (see e.g. *SIM Novine* 11, January 1993; *SIM Novine* 12, March 1993; *SIM Novine* 16, July 1993; *SIM Novine* 17-18, August-September 1993; *SIM Novine* 19, October 1993; *SIM Novine* 21, January 1994; *SIM Novine* 22, February 1994; *SIM Novine* 25, May 1994; *SIM Novine* 26, June 1994; *SIM Novine* 29, September 1994; *SIM Novine* 38, June 1995).

immediately found accommodation and job for themselves, opened firms and shops, or, to say it simply – they have profited on other people's suffering. Because of them, those people who really need housing or anything else, cannot actually get it. [...] It is also a public secret that among all those army 'donors' there is a high number of those who obtained this donation money in a very suspicious way. I claim, under full responsibility, that the most numerous among them are those who came from someplace else, from other territories... They came here and they do not go to fight in the war, while, at the same time, *Semberci* go to fight in Ozren, Kupres, Sarajevo. They have escaped the war on various grounds – that they are donors to the army, officials in the Ministry of Interior, employed in the border police, etc. I am not against *Semberci* fighting in the war, but it is only logical that those who came here from elsewhere, would also go to fight. When we go to protect Vozuća, Treskavica, Nišićka plateau, Sarajevo, it is logical that those who came to Semberija from these very same regions should go and fight side by side with *Semberci*.

In 2001, in an article based on his encounter with Matija, a Serb IDP in Bijeljina, Jansen described the socio-economic situation in Bijeljina in the following way:

The town was dotted with kiosks, market stalls and make-shift warehouses, which gave substance to its reputation as one of the capitals of the post-Yugoslav black market, controlled by leading individuals of the ruling parties. It also contained a very large number of Serbian DPs. Poverty was rife, and Matija and his family, while not the worst off, had seen their living standards dive dramatically due to the war. Even more striking than outright poverty was the conspicuous social inequality: skinny, shabbily dressed DP women cigarette vendors shared the main street with gold-clad, Armani-suited, Mercedes-driving war profiteers. Both Serbian, mind you, and bitter irony has it that the latter creamed off the largest part of the profit created by the former (Jansen 2003: 225).

In an interview I conducted with the wartime commander of the public security station in Bijeljina, the interviewee stressed that many individuals from Sarajevo in particular came to Bijeljina in the early months of the armed conflict, in order to handle smuggling operations and avoid fighting in the war. Many locals and IDPs from other regions were also participating in such activities, but *Sarajlije* managed to stick out due to their close connections with the top political leadership led by the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS)

with its headquarters in Pale near Sarajevo. Many *Sarajlije* were simultaneously holding posts in the state institutions, ministries (some of which were situated in Bijeljina during the war, including the Ministry of Interior), special police units and border police, being backed up by the powerful political structures in Pale and/or working with their consent. Under such circumstances –as it was stressed by the interviewee from the police, as well as by a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina– *Sarajlije* managed to become not only extremely wealthy, but also politically influential to the extent that they had frequent quarrels with the local government in Bijeljina which started losing control even over some basic questions concerning the functioning of the local society. Possession of such power created an atmosphere in which the local population in Bijeljina, as well as IDPs from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, feared *Sarajlije* and refrained from getting into dispute with them (Interview with the wartime commander of the public security station in Bijeljina, 18 August 2016, Bijeljina; Interview with a former high-ranked official in the municipality of Bijeljina, 27 August 2016, Bijeljina). The antagonism felt towards *Sarajlije* was best illustrated in a notorious graffiti written in wartime Bijeljina which stated: ‘Give us back *Balijs* [derogatory term for Bosnian Muslims], and we will give you back *Sarajlije*’ [*Vratite nam Balijs, evo vam Sarajlije*]. The reputation of *Sarajlije* of being quarrelsome or even violent, persist until this day:

When we came to Bijeljina, we lived in a Muslim house. There were many displaced families in my neighbourhood, some locals too, and we went along really well. Children especially. But I remember when *Sarajlije* started arriving to our neighbourhood and how we largely avoided them because we heard that they were dangerous, that they like to fight and drink, and create all sorts of problems. But we were young, we would meet these children from Sarajevo and realize that they were just like us. When I was a teenager, I remember that my grandma always used to ask me if my boyfriend is *Sarajlija* and how relieved she used to be when I told her that he was not [laughs]. [Ana (36), 29 August 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Sarajlije are full of themselves [*puni su sebe*]. There has always been some tension with them, for example, when we would go out. I was working as a security guard, and they would always fight, they were always problems with them. It is still like that. They are full of themselves. And they stick together, they

have that unity. We sometimes call them *tučaroši* [those who love to fight], they tend to solve all their problems through violence. [Vladimir (38), 22 November 2016, Bijeljina]

During our interviews, almost all of my interlocutors from the region of Sarajevo brought out on their own initiative the question of smuggling and other illegal activities conducted by their co-citizens during the armed conflict. Their frequent and extensive discussions have given an impression that Bijeljinan IDPs seem to be preoccupied with this particular issue, which has mostly been translated into the cleavages between two categories of population that have come into existence due to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 'war profiteers' [*ratni profiteri*], and those who have not profited from the war, and which are commonly described as 'ordinary people' [*običan narod, obični ljudi*]:

Ilijašani [people from Ilijaš] they came with a lot of money here. Ilijaš today is not even close to what it used to be before. It had steelwork plant, which worked in close cooperation with the same plant in Zenica. And people took for themselves a lot of goods from these factories during the war. Whoever knew to read and write – they've made something of themselves. Did you know that 5,000 cars were stolen from a factory? Whoever had a driving licence, he took one for himself. Do you know how much smuggling was there during the war? I was on the front line, eating some old beans, having fever, sleeping in a tent, and they were smuggling, their children having 5,000 marks in their pockets! That's nothing but the truth. I have a very bad opinion about these people. You know who was sent to the war to die? The poor ones [*sirotinja*]. [...] There are nice people among them, too, but those who only seek for money and power for themselves, they can't care about ordinary people [*običan narod*] at the same time. [Uroš (66), 14 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Ordinary, normal, working people [*obični, normalni, radni ljudi*], they couldn't make it after the war. They simply couldn't. They came empty-handed, with empty pockets... But those bastards, they didn't even remain in Sarajevo during the war, they left in the beginning, and they managed to provide for themselves in a very suspicious way. When they were leaving Sarajevo, they already had their representatives and tycoons here in Bijeljina, they already had money and what not. They would say that they were in some special police, but it was a pure camouflage. What special police? They were rather deserters who run away! I know what they were doing here in Bijeljina. They came, beat a refugee who

occupied a Muslim house, took the house, and then sold it to somebody who was 'theirs'. Also there in Sarajevo, we had the same bastards. I think that around 2,000 cars were stolen from a storehouse. They held important positions, they didn't want to go and fight in the war, but to do business instead. Yesteryear's postman is today's respected businessman. The same was happening in Sarajevo and in Bijeljina, too. You cannot buy a factory overnight, at least not in an honest way. And ordinary people [*običan narod*] – they are like sheep. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Of all the front lines in the war, ours was the most difficult. But there was also a lot of smuggling, especially done by those who managed to put some power in their hands. Those in the background, those being on some kind of 'working obligations'. [...] Initially, there was that intelligentsia holding the power, but then the worst scum took the power instead of them. I was going to the war, I was protecting my own house and family, and we all needed to go or we would be arrested as deserters otherwise. But these were some ordinary people [*to su sve bili obični ljudi*]. Whoever had a way, whoever knew what was going to happen before the war, they gained a lot, they got rich, and they secured their families on time. Only in one night, around 4,000 cars were stolen from our factory TAS in Vogošća. Then they were selling them for 5,000 marks each, do you know how much money was it back then? [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

I remember when the war started, they sent us to the war, hungry and barefoot, without uniforms, without anything. And politicians, they would come with their officials and advisors, with their expensive cars, while us, soldiers, who were protecting their lives, we didn't have anything to eat. So I didn't like them. Those who were in the war, in the mud, eating one can of food for days, they couldn't do anything for themselves. But those behind, whom these poor soldiers were protecting, they got rich. I was fighting in the war, I was shot in the war, and what did I gain out of it? For years, I have been working hard, me and my wife. And now I have 400 KM of pension and I am struggling to survive. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

Unlike the categories of *pošteni ljudi* [decent, honest people] (Kolind 2007; 2008), or *narod* [people, common folk] (Hromadžić 2013) which are primarily opposed to *politika* and *političari* [politics and politicians], the category of *običan narod* [ordinary people] in

Bijeljina stands opposed to *ratni profiteri* [war profiteers] which goes beyond the sphere of politics. Politicians are seen as corrupt individuals who keep powerful and comfortable positions and work only for their own personal welfare (Grandits 2007), but, as the excerpts above demonstrate, *ratni profiteri* is a category ascribed to wartime politicians, government officials, some members of police and special police units, as well as various individuals who engaged in smuggling and other illegal activities and – usually in cooperation with the former groups– successfully run different businesses. While those who were holding different political and professional posts were exempted from the fighting due to the nature of their work, wartime businessmen paid their way out from recruiting with the money obtained through unlawful conduct. Hence, my interlocutors' loathe towards *ratni profiteri* was primarily oriented towards the specific time when they managed to significantly improve their material condition. Not only did they despised the way in which these war profiteers acquired enormous wealth, but also the fact that it was accomplished during the most difficult period of armed conflict and extreme economic deprivation, that only poor, 'ordinary people' have taken participation in, and struggled to survive through ("You know who was sent to the war to die? The poor ones"; "Those who were in the war, in the mud, eating one can of food for days, they couldn't do anything for themselves. But those behind, whom these poor soldiers were protecting, they got rich", from the excerpts above). In an interview in *SIM Novine* (12/1993), a social worker and a professional psychologist in Bijeljina described the emerging category of war profiteers in this way:

The 'rich minority' includes nouveau riche and war profiteers. Their motto is 'to have a lot, but to work a little'. They live in luxury to impress the others. They consider themselves to be 'important' and 'praiseworthy', therefore they think that they should be 'privileged' too. The biggest problem is that these people have suddenly moved from the bottom, have suddenly become rich, and they have forgotten that some limits to their enrichment should exist, too. There is a lot of immoral behaviour of these people, also a lot of criminal behaviour, but they are not endangered, because they are well-hidden and 'well-covered'.

In the post-war period, the socio-economic inequalities between *ratni profiteri* and *običan narod* have additionally deepened, as the former group managed to transfer their business affairs into legal channels and/or infiltrate into the local political structures (see e.g. Bougarel 2007, Grandits 2007), while the latter, underprivileged masses,

embarked on a long and arduous journey of post-war economic and social recovery (“Ordinary, normal, working people, they couldn’t make it after the war. They simply couldn’t. They came empty-handed, with empty pockets....”; “I was fighting in the war, I was shot in the war, and what did I gain out of it? For years, I have been working hard, me and my wife. And now I have 400 KM of pension and I am struggling to survive”, from the excerpts above). More often than not, many discussions among ‘ordinary people’ end up mentioning war profiteering as one of the most despised outcomes of the 1992-1995 armed conflict, consequences of which are still felt in the local Bijeljina society. War profiteers in today’s Bijeljina are successful businessmen and politicians, exempted from any responsibility for their illegal wartime activities. On the other side, *običan narod* feels embittered for being deceived and intimidated to take up the arms during the war, while, at the same time, those who they considered to be their deceivers and intimidators worked undisturbed and lived in comfort. And not only that the former’s sacrifice was not respected neither the latter’s crimes punished, but ‘ordinary people’ feel that even today they are deprived of their dignity, as they are put in a position to be dependent on these very war profiteers concerning, for example, their employment or employment of their children. Thus, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors, both *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, expressed strong feelings of disrespect and contempt for war profiteers in Bijeljina, regardless of these profiteers’ ethnicity, origin, or ‘local vs. IDP’ status:

There was profiteering everywhere. Bijeljina was on the crossroads. Our people from Ilijaš, our smugglers, they were coming to Bijeljina, buying goods, which their colleagues-smugglers from Bijeljina previously brought in Serbia and transferred over the border. That was happening during the entire war. Such things are inevitability in the times of conflict. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

When the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, the police was the first one to leave Sarajevo municipalities. They were the first to come to Bijeljina, to get employment, because they also had a lot of money. They were some special units, local special units. They knew what could happen, so they left on time, and they put themselves on some important positions, and took big, nice houses. This police was doing miracles [in a negative sense] [*policija je čuda činila*]. [...] On the other side, there is a large number of locals, too, who were becoming rich in

suspicious ways... War profiteers – you have them everywhere [*ratnih profitera – njih ima svuda*]. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Unfortunately, when in 1992 Muslims started leaving Bijeljina, there were some people who used this situation and took as many as two or three emptied houses for themselves. Then, they were selling these houses to those who started arriving later on in Bijeljina, those who didn't have any other accommodation. The sellers were the local Serbs, the local Muslims, and newcomers, too. You can't point finger to just one of these groups. Dishonourable people are dishonourable people, regardless of their ethnicity and origin. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Many have got rich thanks to the war. Those in the police and certain special units... The regular army, they were giving them a few boxes of cigarettes only, and the rest of it would go to the market. Our people abroad would organize and gather some aid for us here. Let's say they managed to collect 100,000 marks. And ordinary soldiers, they maybe got only 20 to 25 marks. The rest finishes elsewhere. It's a public secret. Trucks of aid were coming, supposedly to help the soldiers, but large quantities of it were finishing on the market. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

The fact that this topic has been discussed frequently and in variety of situations and contexts, gives the impression that the 'war profiteers vs. ordinary people' dichotomy represents one of the most dominant identifications in the local Bijeljinan society which transcends not only IDPs vs. locals relationship, but the usual ethno-national divisions, as well ("Dishonourable people are dishonourable people, regardless of their ethnicity and origin", from the excerpt above). However, although the cleavages between *ratni profiteri* and *običan narod* shape discourses of identification in the local Bijeljinan society in general, it is mostly the two particular population groups within this local society –*Semberci* and *Sarajlije*– that are commonly associated with profiteering during the war. As it was described above, according to my interlocutors in Bijeljina, these are the two groups which possess the most power in their hands –*Semberci* through holding the monopoly over the top positions in local government and political parties, and *Sarajlije* through holding the monopoly over the business sector and professional services– and are thus being mutually perceived as the biggest threat to each other. Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) stressed that one of the most significant aspects of the

established-outsider (i.e. local-newcomer) relationship is the complementarity of group charisma (one's own) and group disgrace (that of others), meaning that the image of our group ('us') has a tendency to be based on the most excellent part of an idealised group, while the image of another, threatening group ('them'), is based on those worse off, whose characters are negatively enhanced (see also Ohlsson 2003). In Bijeljina too, although only a relatively small number of *Semberci* and *Sarajlije* could be characterized as *ratni profiteri*, the negative image has reflected on the entire community of these population groups. What is more, the individual wartime criminal activities have stimulated the ascription of other negative personality traits, which are furthermore attributed to the whole group these individuals are associated with, and accepted as this group's most striking and determining feature. This is how some of my interlocutors, both locals and IDPs, talked about *Sarajlije* in Bijeljina:

Sarajlije were trying to stick out from the rest of the population even before the war. They have a specific mentality, some specific way of presenting themselves, or even a specific charm... They are simply different. The way they speak, their habits and lifestyle... Even those who came from *around* Sarajevo, and not the city itself, they are also really problematic in that sense, although they have been 'cultivated' a bit in the meantime. There is reason why they call them *šibicari* [swindlers, tricksters] – they are not hesitating to deceive you. They might be good for having fun with, but generally, they are bad-tempered and are prone to fighting, cheating or deceiving you. And they stick together a lot [*drže se zajedno*]. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Sarajlije are somehow prouder people than the rest of us, they have that superior attitude, maybe that's why people don't like them. They have that attitude like there is nobody as good as them. Sarajevo is really a large city, especially comparing to Bijeljina. But they are not really from Sarajevo, but some villages around, and they used to see Sarajevo only when they needed to see a doctor or something like that. But that doesn't matter, they have that attitude nevertheless. Their whole appearance, their accent when they speak, it reveals that superior attitude of theirs. [Marko (34), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Today, I think *Sarajlije* differentiate the most from the rest of us. The rest of us, we've melted a bit, got intertwined, but not the *Sarajlije*. They still have some way of behaviour, some jokes, which are *seljačke* [peasant], in my opinion. When

I hear it, I question this person's intelligence. I don't know how to say it differently. I am simply irritated by that, because I have an impression that all those who are speaking in this way, they somehow want to show that they are superior in relation to all of us. Like they are saying: 'We are *Sarajlije*, from the capital city, and we are *gospoda* [gentlemen] compared to all of you'. It's like they are using their slangs and their language to protect their culture and tradition. I don't say they are bad people, but it's like they are hitting me in my head every time they use that word *jarane* [friend, pal, buddy]. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

I have goose bumps every time I hear that word *jarane*. When you go to the market place and you hear a seller using the word *jarane*, you should run away from him as fast as you can, because there is a big chance that he is going to deceive you. Ninety per cent chance, I would say. [...] My friends too, they say that when they hear those words 'BA' or *jarane*, they immediately think that some scams are going to occur. If not a scam, then some 'combination' [*kombinacija*], because they are phonies and swindlers. In these 'combinations' with them, nothing is ever clear, you never get what you expect or what you were promised to. There is always somebody who gets the short end of the stick in dealing with them. [Mladen (33), 22 November 2016, Bijeljina]

There are some of us who are proud to be called *izbjeglica*. For example, those from Visoko or Ilijaš. They want to present themselves as if they were some special race, above all the rest of us. They talk how they had factories, money, this and that, and came here where everybody worked in the fields. And then they supposedly remained at that higher level compared to the rest of us. But the truth is it that they came from a region *around* Sarajevo, not Sarajevo itself. These were some *čaršijice*⁶¹, neither a town nor a village. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

The above excerpts also reveal that Bijeljinan population uses the urban-rural origin as one of the defining components of people's understanding who they are and who other people are. The dialect spoken by *Sarajlije* in Bijeljina, different expressions they use, and their manner of joking, are all associated with peasant mentality, while *Sarajlije's*

⁶¹ *Čaršija* [diminutive: *čaršijica*] means market place or bazaar, a commercial centre of the city originating from the Ottoman times. Colloquially, as it is case with this particular interview excerpt, and especially when used in diminutive, it also refers to a small, less urbanized and less developed settlement, "neither a town nor a village".

superior attitude is linked to the lack of true urban qualities which they supposedly try to compensate by falsely emphasizing their pre-war urbanity (the statement that they did not live in towns but some villages or *čaršijice* at best), or treating others with underestimation and disrespect. As it will be discussed below, defining one's urbanity or rurality and comparing it to the urbanity or rurality of others, represents one of the most prominent aspects of Bijeljina IDPs' identification process.

7.2. Urban-rural dichotomy: Comparing 'backwardness' in Bijeljina

In Chapter 2 it was stressed that the 1992-1995 war has stimulated the continuation of the urbanization process which had its roots in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whereby not only refugees and IDPs, but Bosnian and Herzegovinian population in general, replaced their lives in the countryside by a more comfortable and easy-going lives in the city (Belloni 2007; Jansen 2007, 2011; Phuong 2000, 2004; Toal and Dahlman 2004). The local population in Bijeljina also believes that at the time of political disarray and socio-economic turmoil which went together with the period of the armed conflict in the early 1990s, many *Semberci* who lived in the countryside used the opportunity to move to the city, very often occupying abandoned Bosniak houses at the expense of incoming IDPs who lost their houses in the war and were deprived of an adequate accommodation in Bijeljina. As it has been the case with urban locals in some other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bougarel 1999; Graves 2017; Kolind 2008; Sorabji 2006; Stefansson 2007; see Chapter 2), many of my interlocutors from the category of the local population also hold the stance that rural population is the most responsible for starting the war in the first place, attaching to this particular group of people radical political views and strong nationalistic feelings. Here is how *Semberske Novine* (243/1991), in its issue from April 1991, described this emerging process of bringing rural values into Bijeljina's urban environment at the outset of the armed conflict, calling rural population "aggressive barbarians" "with muddy boots" who were, especially through their prominent nationalism, getting the society ready for the "revenge of the countryside" (Bougarel 1999):

[...] Today, all those stories about order and mutual respect in the city that existed between the two [world] wars, seem unrealistic. Germans, Jews, Serbs, Muslims, and others, those people of the city, they all had that unwritten system of moral rules which was always strictly respected. Neighbour did not bother another neighbour, a respected citizen could not walk through the city without being greeted by everybody, nobody was allowed to spoil or destroy something that was not his, or something he has not built himself. New barbarians with muddy boots and *opanci* [peasant shoes] have crushed the soul of the city, its tolerance, and understanding; they find the word 'citizen' derogatory, for them the wisdom is some unknown force, and culture is a threatening evil. [...] Why do you think that only snobs are shouting how endangered they are, and that those real city-dwellers are almost non-present in the nationalist parties? Because, as the order of the city requests: you cannot do anything at the expense of your neighbour, friend, acquaintance, or even an unknown passer-by. In front of your house, you should remove snow, so that it does not endanger anybody. You should not shout, listen to those barbarian songs loudly, so that you do not wake your neighbours up. You have to make a space on the road for an elderly, you have to give your seat in the bus to a woman, you have to help the weak ones, and you have to respect the centuries-long rules which enable so many different people to live and last together... [...] That is the city that they do not understand. [...] The city is getting silenced and put aside under the invasion of new, aggressive barbarians which would rather destroy something, than get accustomed to it. And they would rather stick to their myths and *gusle*, than look other people in the eye. They would rather destroy the memories of the city, so that in the end all that remains is a wasteland with buildings with no meanings and people with no personalities – this is their mission.

The cultural dichotomy between urban and rural is very much present in contemporary Bijeljina, as well. Some of my interlocutors from the city proper complained about the newcomers from Semberija's countryside who presumably used their political and other connections to 'invade' the city and occupy the best employment positions, spreading their rural values and peasant lifestyle throughout Bijeljina's urban environment. Therefore, certain divisions have been formed not only between locals and IDPs, but between urban and rural locals, as well:

When people cannot fulfil some of their ambitions, then they emphasize those differences among us, those divisions on *mještani* and *izbjeglice*, and it has been

present until this day. For example, if somebody wants to get to a certain position, especially in the sphere of politics, then he complains how he cannot get it only because he is *izbjeglica* or because he is *Semberac*. [...] *Bijeljinci*, on their side, complain that villagers took all the positions and power in the city. I often hear people saying how the village has taken over the city entirely [*selo je u potpunosti preuzelo grad*]. [Darko (33), 17 August 2016, Bijeljina]

We, the native and real *Bijeljinci*, we are ‘endangered species’ in Semberija. So many city-dwellers emigrated, went to live someplace else, and some of us that remained, we are ‘endangered species’. We are endangered by villagers and by *izbjeglice* at the same time. It’s true. We are nowhere to be found. So we try to stick together, we have some our internal jokes, our spheres of interest, you can see that we are different than the rest of the population. [Marko (34), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

On the other side, my interlocutors from the category of Bijeljinan displaced population also believed that the war and forcible displacement actually benefited some groups of displaced people, especially those who lived in rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. What was initially involuntary movement for this category of population, has in the meantime become a chance for a new beginning in a more urban physical and social environment, which offers more possibilities for advancement and guarantees easier ways of regaining control over their lives.⁶² The rural IDPs are usually the ones who are associated with smuggling and other illegal activities during the war, which makes them even more despised, and their current social status even more questionable:

These people who came from some villages I have never heard of, even though I lived in a nearby town, they didn’t even have electricity before the war. Can you imagine that? Now, they have made a lot of money for themselves. I have to admit that they are really capable [*jako su snalažljivi*]. They’ve earned millions, and I respect that. They were smuggling cigarettes, alcohol, fuel, they were paying not to serve in the war, and they have built big houses, opened factories and different companies... These huge amounts of money only smugglers could have earned. And we all know who smugglers are. I don’t know any intellectual

⁶² This urbanization trend among rural IDPs, i.e. their unwillingness to return to their homes in rural areas even though they had the opportunity to do so, has been so evident that it found place in popular music, too. The famous lyrics of one such song, addressing Radovan Karadžić, the wartime leader of Bosnian Serbs, are saying: *Karadžiću, ljubim te u bradu, živio sam u selu, sad živim u gradu* [Hey, Karadžić, let me kiss your beard (as an act of expressing gratitude and respect), for that I used to live in the village, and now I live in the city].

who does smuggling. They have raised up in a material sense, but not in any other way. [Jasna (51), 23 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Those from Sarajevo, they were certainly more literate than some *izbjeglice* from Ozren, for example. Those from Ozren, they are proud to be called *izbjeglice*, because they have gained a lot thanks to the war. Some of my neighbours here who came to Bijeljina from Ozren, they didn't even have electricity in their house before the war. They lived in some *čuke*⁶³, God knows where – some villages that nobody has ever heard of. I can't imagine that there were places where people didn't have electricity. What were these places they lived in? [Ivan (47), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

As it will be discussed below, while the urban-rural dichotomy has an impact on social relationships *within* both local and displaced group of people in Bijeljina, it has been the most apparent, and it has gained the most significance, in shaping the relationship *between* these very two groups. Therefore, similarly to the relationship between locals and newcomers in wider Bosnia and Herzegovina discussed in Chapter 2, whereby local population of urban origin associated rural newcomers with lack of 'culture' (seeing them, among other, as uneducated, backward, primitive, poor, traditional, religious and nationalistic) (Kolind 2008; Maček 2009; Pickering 2007; Stefansson 2006, 2007), in Bijeljina as well, the urban-rural dichotomy seems to be the main context in which these two groups perceive the self and the other. There is also an important difference: in popular discourse, it is the locals in Bijeljina who have been associated with characteristic 'rural mentality', while the newcomers struggled to present themselves as urban, modern and sophisticated. Thus, unlike Elias' and Scotson's study on Winston Parva (1994 [1965]) in which newcomers ('the outsiders') accepted the lower status ascribed to them by the established groups, in Bijeljina it is mostly the newcomers who have attributed negative identity to the local population ('the established'). In doing so, as it will be discussed below, Bijeljinan IDPs who were displaced from industrial regions and large urban centres and had a well-developed sense of their own identity, tend to be more inclined than some other regionally-defined groups of IDPs in this city to perceive their co-ethnics in Bijeljina as culturally inferior. This more general pattern of identification does not mean that the locals too do not tend to associate themselves with

⁶³ *Čuka* [plural: *čuke*] means mountainous top, but is also used, like in the comment in question, to describe remote, underdeveloped settlements.

'urban qualities' and 'urban mentality'. Social psychology theories stress this identification process implies social comparison between 'us' and 'them', whereby in order to maintain its positive group distinctiveness and self-esteem, the in-group is compared favourably against other ones, which can result in negative stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against the other group (Hogg and Abrams 1998). As being 'urban' is seen as a highly positive quality equally by locals and IDPs in Bijeljina, both of these two groups tend to identify themselves as such, either by explicitly stressing this presumed quality of theirs, or by attaching the opposite ('rural') qualities to the other, very similar group. One group's perceived level of urbanity/cultured-ness, compared to the other group's level of rurality/uncultured-ness, has been used to create and maintain the efficient boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. The formation and maintenance of such boundaries secures the existence and persistence of these two social groups in Bijeljina.

7.2.1. Who is a bigger *seljak*?

The urban-rural dichotomy between IDPs and locals in Bijeljina represents the most decisive factor in both these groups' self-identification process, and the most important aspect of the process of boundary maintenance between 'us' and 'them'. By 'measuring' each other's urbanity/rurality, i.e. by raising the question of who is a bigger *seljak* [peasant, villager; plural: *seljaci*], locals and IDPs in Bijeljina are undergoing the process of understanding what each of these groups of people is –or is not– vis-à-vis the other group. In Bijeljina, as it is the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, the word *seljak* does not only describe a person who lives in a village and is engaged in agricultural activities. The word also carries derogatory meanings which are questioning this person's culture, education, manners, even some basic human virtues and characteristics. Therefore, when *Semberci* and *izbjeglice* are comparing who is a bigger *seljak*, they are putting into comparison each other's level of urbanity or rurality, but also each other's level of cultured-ness, education, cosmopolitanism, and overall sophistication.

All interviewed IDPs, without exception, raised the issue of rural-urban origin on their own initiative when they were asked to describe their position and experiences in the local Bijeljina society. Unlike their feelings of loss and memories of traumatic displacement experiences – which are to some extent hidden under thick layers of everyday life, their sense of selves which is linked to their perceived level of urbanity (and rurality of others) remains very much evident throughout the wider social space in Bijeljina. The issue of urban-rural origin shapes everyday discourses of both locals and newcomers in Bijeljina, whether being used simply as a joke (especially among younger generations), or as a key determinant that reveals people's personal qualities (or lack thereof), or has the power to give or subtract people's rights and privileges. Many of my interlocutors mentioned how during some social gatherings they organize, they need to specify to their guests if among them there are some *Semberci* (or, in case that the event was organized by the locals – if there are some *izbjeglice*), just to prevent the usual discussions concerning the rurality and urbanity of locals and IDPs in Bijeljina, which in the end typically turns out to be offensive to one group. The local news portals in Bijeljina are filled with heated debates between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice* questioning each other's urbanity, no matter what the actual news refers to, or whether the topic had anything to do with the relationship between locals and newcomers. Here are the excerpts from the comment section under the news articles⁶⁴ which addressed the following subjects: 1) the news concerning one politician in Bijeljina who requested restructuring of the party's local leadership so that it includes more individuals born in Semberija; 2) the news that the city of Bijeljina is about to get a new taxi service; and 3) the news that a teenager attempted to shoot another teenager in a popular Bijeljina's coffee bar:

Such a pity that nobody from Semberija is in the top, it's such an intellectual disadvantage [sarcastically]! And when in the past the leadership of the party functioned without any *izbjeglice*, you were not so infuriated! Just go and plant some cabbage.

⁶⁴ See "Vojin Mitrović prijeti SNSD-u sa vrućom jeseni", Info Bijeljina, 26 September 2017, av. at: https://www.infobijeljina.com/27157_Vojin-Mitrovic-prijeti-SNSD-u-sa-vrucom-jeseni.html [accessed: 5 April 2018]; "Nova taksi služba uskoro u Bijeljini", Info Bijeljina, 17 October 2017, av. at: https://www.infobijeljina.com/27773_Nova-taksi-sluzba-uskoro-u-Bijeljini.html [accessed: 5 April 2018]; and "Bijeljina: Maloljetnik naoružan puškom ušao u lokal, savladali ga gosti", Info Bijeljina, 9 November 2017, av. at: https://www.infobijeljina.com/28460_Bijeljina-Maloljetnik-naoruzan-puskom-usao-u-lokal-savladali-ga-gosti.html [accessed: 5 April 2018].

How long are we going to make these divisions on *Semberci* and others? Listen to that: 'there is no one from Semberija!' So where are they from? From Mars? They have lived for 25 years in Semberija, and this politician says there is no one from Semberija in his party! When we had the elections, then you did not ask only for *Semberci* to vote for you. Then, you liked 'the others' quite the same.

One 'bravo' for this statement that we lack *Semberci* in the top! These other people, they just came from someplace and attacked Bijeljina like grasshoppers... If they were at least those people that came to Bijeljina during the war, but, instead, they are just some scum that came down from some *čuke*...

'These other people, they just came from someplace and attacked Bijeljina like grasshoppers...' Do you actually want to say: smarter, more educated, better-mannered, more cultured people, but you can't let these words go out from your mouth? You are good for cabbage only, and nothing else.

(Info Bijeljina, 29 September 2017)

Those taxi drivers from Ilijaš got some competition, they are already nervous...

You in Bijeljina, you didn't even know what a taxi was before we came...

Who remembers 1992 when *izbjeglice* came to Bijeljina and were just learning how to ride a bicycle, and when we needed to make an appeal via radio programme for them to start using a sidewalk?

It must be *izbjeglice* from some other regions, and not Sarajevo, because we did not come in 1992, but after the Dayton in 1996. But I am not surprised that people drove on sidewalks, because your roads were rough and bumpy like in the Ottoman times! And how advanced you are – we can see that you are building a sewage system in the city some 40 years after us from Ilijaš!

Whoever does not like Bijeljina, they should go away from here as soon as possible. That would be honest. But, it is never going to happen. Nobody wants to leave something that is better, and go somewhere where it is worse. All of you who came to Bijeljina, you had nothing before you came.

(Info Bijeljina, 17 October 2017)

It's all those *izbjeglice*.... Those that came to our city and brought their 'culture' with themselves...

It's sad that you are such a bad man... Those *izbjeglice* you mentioned – they have made a city out of Bijeljina's *kasaba*⁶⁵, and you are still so jealous.

I believe you are a bad man when you have such an opinion about Bijeljina. If it is really like you say, why haven't you returned or gone someplace else, but you decided to stay here?

What do you know about *izbjeglice*? We have built Bijeljina and made it a city! It was not a city before we came. You are just jealous because we have managed to accomplish here in several years what you could not have accomplished for one hundred years of your cabbage life!

Oh, yes, you have developed our city [sarcastically]! Bijeljina did not have a chance to develop before the war because everything [it produced] needed to go to damn Sarajevo! You should cherish this Bijeljina – many of you learnt a thing or two only after climbing down from your mountains to this very city!

All evil that has happened in Bijeljina, it came from those who came from someplace else. It's evident that various problems in the city only they have been creating. In life, it is better to have AIDS than *Sarajlije*, because with AIDS you can live more normally.⁶⁶ *Semberci* are honourable people that work hard for every *dinar* they earn. I've left my city just not to watch that evil – read: *izbjeglice*, anymore.

It's obvious that you 'cannot have *Saralija*' because not everybody deserves one. The fact that you left your own city is saying that *you* are evil, and not *izbjeglice*,

⁶⁵ *Kasaba* is a small settlement or small town dating back to Ottoman times. Here it is used to denote an underdeveloped settlement.

⁶⁶ This statement represents one of the numerous 'dark humour' jokes concerning the relationship between locals and newcomers, which are widespread within the local Bijeljina society. There is also another similar popular joke among Bijeljina population (locals and non-Sarajevan IDPs alike) which says that when people are asked whether they would prefer to have a tumour or *Sarajlije* as neighbours, they would always choose tumour, because, unlike *Sarajlije*, the tumour can be benign. IDP, on the other side, usually joke that the best *Semberac* is the one from the village of Dijelovi, which literally means the best *Semberac* is the one 'cut into pieces' [*Najbolji je Semberac u dijelovima; Najbolji je Semberac iz dijelova*].

because you can't stand somebody else's success. You prefer to be a slave someplace abroad, than to live with educated and cultured *izbjeglice* in your city.

(Info Bijeljina, 9 November 2017)

In my interlocutors' opinion, distinguished rural character of Semberija and rurality of its population has been the biggest shock Bijeljinan IDPs faced in the early years of displacement, and the fact which they needed years to get accustomed to. Today, it is the most important difference that separates 'us' from 'them'. Interestingly, even those IDPs from some small and remote villages shared the same views about the local population. They would usually acknowledge their own rural origins and rural lifestyle, but would at the same time stress that they still used to be 'a bit more advanced' or 'a bit more cultured' than their fellow peasants from Bijeljina. Here is how Nikola (36) whose pre-war place of residence was situated in a remote mountainous region with the population of 464 people, and Marina (29) from a village with the population of 367 people located in a proximity of a semi-urban centre (Population census 1991), talked about their first impressions about Bijeljina and *Bijeljinci*. Their objections towards the way people in Bijeljina spoke, or the music Bijeljinan teenagers listened to, are actually those 'minor differences' (Blok 1998) between otherwise very similar groups, which are singled out to serve the purpose of comparing favourably one's in-group against the other one, and establishing social boundaries between them:

When we came to Bijeljina, it was the first time that I heard the word '*mahala*'⁶⁷. It means not really like a street, but like there is a part of the city with different 'mahalas', or neighbourhoods. And it was usually those city *mahalaši* [people from *mahala*] that emphasized that relationship *izbjeglice* vs. *Semberci*. But I didn't notice any townfolk when I first came to this city, in the true meaning of that word. I had family members living in Tuzla before the war, and I was visiting them, I knew what it meant to be a city-dweller, to have that behaviour and culture. But Bijeljina, it was more like some *kasaba*. Honestly, as I was going to the school in Gornja Tuzla where Muslims were in majority, to me, people in Bijeljina, with their speech and behaviour, they reminded me more of these Muslims I went to school with, than they reminded me of us, the Serbs. They used some slangs as if they were Muslims. I still meet people who speak in this

⁶⁷ *Mahala* is a word which dates back to the Ottoman times. It refers to a part of a rural or urban settlement; a neighbourhood or a quarter.

way, and I sometimes think they are indeed Muslims. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

When we arrived to Bijeljina, I just started going to high school. I was different from the rest of my peers in Bijeljina. We were teenagers and it was important who listens to what music. Where I came from, a lot of young people listened to rock 'n' roll or punk, but in Bijeljina at the time, many listened to turbo-folk. We had some individuals who listened to turbo-folk too, but in Bijeljina that music was dominant, it was mainstream.⁶⁸ So I really didn't have any place where I could go out. [...] Also, I attended medical school that mostly children from Semberija's countryside were attending. You know, their parents from villages were sending them to become nurses and doctors [mockingly]. I was bothered by that, too, and I hardly got accustomed to that school in the beginning. I like socializing, but I had nothing in common with those children. I remember coming back home from school and crying because everybody were ugly in my classroom. I couldn't adapt *that* much that it seemed to me as if they were all ugly. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

This characterisation is a two-way process. When the local population shares its views on the newcomers, the most frequently mentioned thing is that IDPs are 'uncultured' and 'more backward' than the local population of Semberija, especially having in mind the IDPs' primitive customs and practices, their unsophisticated taste in music, and their sometimes aggressive bearing and warrior-like attitude. One of the best-known anecdotes which I have heard many times and from different sources, is that the IDPs were so backward at the moment of their arrival to Bijeljina that they were honestly surprised when they saw that all houses possess a drinking water. Allegedly, a child came to her mother shouting surprisingly: "Mom, you won't believe it, there is water coming out from the wall!" As it was discussed in the section on *Sarajlije* in Bijeljina, even when the locals talk about those IDPs who came from urban areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they tend to say that most of them actually lie about their origins. In their words, these IDPs have surely come from some remote settlements which surround these urban areas, but are ashamed to admit so. Some of my interlocutors from the

⁶⁸ On musical taste (more specifically – rock 'n' roll as opposed to so-called 'turbo-folk') as an important marker of the urban vs. rural/peasant culture, as well as the signifier of one's orientation toward the regime, the war, and the social environment, see Gordy, Eric D. (2000): „Turbaši and Rokeri as Windows into Serbia's Social Divide“, *Balkanologie [En ligne]* 4:1, p. 1-23

category of displaced population in Bijeljina mentioned how offensive this generalisations have been to them:

Semberci were treating us like we were all the same. Not all *Semberci*, but large majority of them thought that we are all illiterate, that we are all some *seljaci* from mountains, that we had no culture, and that we didn't have anything before the war – how could we have something in those mountainous regions? Then they were saying that we don't know what a white cloth is that housewives put over the table, that we don't know that there can be water in the house... Maybe there were some *izbjeglice* who came from remote villages of Majevisa and Ozren where they indeed didn't have drinkable water in their houses and where they were taking water from the wells, but this story spread easily and they took the chance to humiliate all of us together... And me – eight years before the war, I was working on computer. The firm I used to work for was very good, very advanced, we had computers when others didn't even know what computers are. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

I used to come to Bijeljina before the war, because I had some relatives here. Bijeljina had one street, the main street, same like my town. So, my town was also small, but it was urbanized. It wasn't like Bijeljina. We had different streets with residential buildings, a park, and whole blocks of different buildings, while family houses were in another part of the town. It was a proper town. But here in Bijeljina, it wasn't like that. But, despite this, *they* still say for *us* that we are from some *selendre* [villages, derogatory], and that *we* are not urbanized. [Biljana (61), 28 September 2016, Bijeljina]

The cultural dichotomy between urban and rural in Bijeljina in many instances correlates with the divisions which have been created between *brđani* [highlanders] and *ravničari* [lowlanders], i.e. between the perceived mentality of those people who originate from mountainous regions (most of Bijeljinan IDPs), and those who live in the plains (local population in Semberija). Generally speaking, the way in which each of these groups is going to be portrayed, i.e. the stereotypes which are going to be employed, is highly contextual, and it depends on the specific circumstances, the subjects involved, and the particular purpose of making such kind of evaluations.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For example, in her study on social life of Asia Minor refugees in the Athenian suburb of Kokkinia, Hirschon (1998 [1989]: 33-35) talked about the Greek refugees seeing the local Greeks as 'shepherds from the mountains' who are, among other, uncultured, rough and boorish. This topographical image

Thus, as Živković (2012) noted, both these groups could be given a whole spectrum of variously shaded characteristics: *ravničari* could be perceived as rational, pragmatic and cultivated, or degenerate, soft and submissive, while *brđani* could be seen as brave, proud and of superior mettle, or as violent, primitive and arrogant.⁷⁰ In Bijeljina, both *Semberci* as *ravničari* and *izbjeglice* as *brđani* strive to present the other group as socially, culturally and morally inferior, attaching to each other an array of negative personality traits which presumably stem out from their established way of life, conditioned by the specific morphology of a terrain where these groups in question originate from. The locals tend to believe that their general attitudes towards life and other people are softer and their characters milder, as well as that they are more cultivated and relaxed when compared to the newcomers in Bijeljina from mountainous regions:

If you compare them to the real Bijeljina urban population, these *izbjeglice* are much more backward, narrow-minded and aggressive. That is due to their overall mentality, that's due to that 'syndrome of rural origin'. And Bijeljina was lucky to be so close to Belgrade, the largest urban centre in Yugoslavia. If we needed something more, including education, we went to Belgrade. [...] But generally, people say that Semberija's plain is pretty, rich and peaceful. [Marko (34), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

implies spatial metaphor of 'open' and 'closed' states, whereby the former one is a positive state, "denoting a communal mode of orientation, sociability, new life, continuity, luck, light, and the divine realm", while the latter one is a negative state, and denotes "isolation, confinement, deprivation". Thus, while the pre-displacement world of Asia Minor refugees was 'open', i.e. cosmopolitan and bustling, the world of local, 'mountainous' Greeks was 'closed', i.e. inward-looking, isolated and remote.

⁷⁰ Today's stereotypical portrayal of groups of people who inhabit different geographical regions originates in the work of Serbian geographer and ethnologist Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), which concerns the analysis on Balkan personality types and the effects of the physical environment on a population's psyche. His most famous psychological type, the so-called 'Dinaric type' [*dinarski tip*], refers to the mentality of people who inhabit the mountain range of Dinaric Alps which extends the length of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast from Istria to Albania, whereby the 'Dinaric Highlanders' were distinguished by their bravery, heroism, sharp intelligence, rich phantasy, great self-confidence, loyalty to ancestors, as well as ideas of justice and freedom which very often qualifies them as leaders of national movements and revolutions. The most strongly opposed to these characteristics of the Dinaric type is the 'rayah mentality' [*rajinski mentalitet*; 'rayah' is a Turkish word for subjected Christians] of the valley folk in those regions where the population was exposed to centuries-long Ottoman oppression. The characteristics of the 'rayah type' include: the worship of authorities, pragmatism, egoism, submissiveness, servility and resentment (Cvijić 2014). In the 1990s, Cvijić's work was extensively deployed in the academic debates between different Yugoslav nations (and especially in Serbo-Croatian rivalries), whereby the sociologists at the time tried to explain the war and violence through Dinaric type's presupposed aggressiveness, wildness and narrow-mindedness, as opposed to the peaceful, stable, and tolerant peasants from the lowlands (on this see Živković 2012; also Allcock 2002; Graves 2017).

There are huge differences in our mentalities, and these differences are often clashing, they can't stand each other. People in Semberija are somehow casual and relaxed, maybe too slow sometimes... We are not into some suspicious jobs, some 'combinations', we are just relaxed, self-sufficient, living our own life. And then, so many new people come to our city, from so many different regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, each bringing some different customs, mentalities, patterns of behaviour and different cultural level. So there must be... no conflict, but some tension, for sure. [...] Their way of life makes no sense to us, and ours to them. We are people from the plain, and those who came here, they are mostly from the mountains. People who live in the plain are easy-going, casual... Even when we speak, it is slower, we stretch our words a bit. And when somebody comes from the altitude of 2,000 or 3,000 metres, differences are huge. [...] They might be capable of providing for themselves, but it is somehow done with a kind of different energy. *Semberac*, he is hard-working man and he does not ask for anything spectacular in his life. It's all up to people's mentality. Mentality gets formed and developed based on hundreds of years of life in specific geographical regions. [Mladen (33), 22 November 2016, Bijeljina]

Here in plain, we build houses next to other houses, they are close. Their houses, there in the mountains, they are far away from one another. They communicate by shouting over the hills and they are loud when they speak. Their way of communication is simply different than ours. [Milena (58), 18 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Those from Majevisa Mountain, they are a special kind of people. They are honourable and honest – that is their main characteristic, but they are also narrow-minded and simply backward. They have that typical hilly mentality. They are honest, they won't deceive you or trick you, but if they believe you did them any harm, they won't hesitate to chop you into pieces. [laughs] So, you can joke with them, but you have to be careful not to cross the line. That is that mentality of those mountainous *zabiti* [backward, underdeveloped places]. [Slavica (38), 13 August 2016, Bijeljina]

On the other side, as opposed to the population who lives in Semberija's plain, Bijeljinar IDPs believe that the mere fact that they originate from mountainous and hilly regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina makes them more sociable, compassionate, resourceful, spiritual and free-minded:

People from mountains, we are more connected to each other, and more compassionate... Let me tell you a story. I spoke with a very old man who used to work as a forester for his entire life. He told me how he used to work in all the regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from Krajina to Romanija, in Semberija and Majevisa, there is no place he has not been to. And he said how when he was working in the mountains, he would run into a man who was cutting a grass in his pasture, and this man would stop his work immediately and invite the forester to sit, rest, eat and drink together. But in Semberija, he said, when a man sees the forester leaving the forest, they would go into the house so that they were not seen, they would even call their children to go into the house, and they would hide the bucket from the well in their yard, so that the forester cannot even drink a water if he is thirsty. So, here you see a difference. Up there [in the mountains], people are more oriented towards each other. [Ivan (47), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I have a friend who is down there from Herzegovina, and I asked him to explain to me how come that people from his region are so resourceful [*snalazljivi*]? And he answered to me: 'My friend, when our mothers give birth to us, they just let us go on that rough limestone of ours, and we are, even as young children, paying attention where we step and what do we do, so that we do not hurt ourselves. We simply needed to find our own way.' He said it all. That geography, that relief, it shapes people's characters. [...] I also remember our bishop, who is displaced from Tuzla to Bijeljina, saying at one point how God has given to *Semerci* a lot of fertile land so that they can cultivate it, and to us, *brđani*, he's given us sheep to put them to graze, while we are lying down in the grass, looking at the wide sky, thinking, and philosophizing about everything... [...] And we know that no agriculturalist or worker has written some poetry. But those with a surplus of free time, like the ones in mountains, they have. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

The first difference between our people is mountain vs. plain. Believe it or not, it can affect a lot the people's way of living and thinking. People from the hills, we are more involved in animal breeding, because we have less arable land and more forests... There was little space for agriculture. It probably affected our way of living – most of our lives presupposed a constant fight for survival, how to provide enough food for our families. Whatever we were producing, we were producing for our households only. [...] Here in Semberija, people don't see

anything from their corn fields. And us, from the hills, we can see farther away, we can see people on another hill, we can see our land on another hill from the other side, we can see what is going on there with people in a valley... [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

You judge a person's character by the altitude of the region this person lives in. And *Semberci*, they are somewhere around 'zero'. [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

As the main economic activity of people in the flatland regions, agriculture has become the main point of intersection between the urban-rural and highlander-lowlander dichotomies which dominate the relationship between locals and newcomers in Bijeljina. Based on the fact that Semberija is an agricultural region, while the most places where Bijeljina IDPs originate from are not, my interlocutors stressed people's engagement in agriculture as the most important difference that separates 'us' from 'them'. In doing so, they employed different stereotypes concerning the life in a village as backward, and being involved in agriculture as primitive and unsophisticated. At the same time, although there are many urban *Semberci* who have the occupations outside the sphere of agriculture and have little or no connection with rural lifestyle, according to Bijeljina IDPs, being a *Semberac* almost always implies being a *seljak*, as well. Also, despite the fact that many rural *Semberci* could not fit into IDPs' narratives of rural 'mentality' and rural lifestyle, the negative image has reflected on the entire population which resides in Semberija's countryside. According to my interviewees, the urbanity (cultured-ness) of *izbjeglice*, in comparison to rurality (uncultured-ness) of *Semberci*, has been the most evident in people's lifestyle, as well as in the way in which they organize their households, regulate their family and neighbourly relations, and practice their religious and other customs.

7.2.1.1. Lifestyle

Dobro jutro, kako ste? Jeste li se naspavali? [Good morning, how are you? Have you slept well?]

Dobro jutro, jeste li poranili? Jeste li vrijedni? [Good morning, aren't you up early? Aren't you working hard?]⁷¹

The above greetings, very common in the region of Semberija, are probably the best illustration of how in the opinion of the displaced population in Semberija, their lifestyle differ from the local population's one. The first greeting refers to Bijeljina IDPs' perceived hospitality, sociability and joy they find in leisure time, including sleeping and resting from work and other domestic chores. For the locals, as the second greeting epitomizes, working, or even working hard from the early morning, possess the greatest value that could be found in a person.

North-eastern Bosnian region of Semberija with Bijeljina as its administrative centre is situated on the outermost rim of the fertile Pannonia Plain, thanks to which agriculture has been the most developed economic sector in the region (see Chapter 4). As such, agriculture, and people's general connectedness to the land, have made a big impact on the way that the local population in Semberija organizes its life activities. According to Bijeljina IDPs, the lifestyle of the local population differs from their own in many aspects. Whether my interlocutors came from towns or their suburbs and surrounding villages, they have never possessed big land surfaces, neither had they engaged in agricultural activities on a large scale. Not being able to rely on the land as a source of income, people from these, mostly hilly and mountainous regions, needed to obtain higher education and look for employment opportunities in the industrial sector, or they became skilled tradesmen and craftsmen. Many of them did live in the villages, but were working in large and medium-sized towns and were in touch with these town's norms, customs, and overall urban spirit. Such kind of employment provided regular salaries, paid holidays, and various other benefits that peasants in Semberija could not afford due to the nature of their work:

⁷¹ Joel M. Halpern documented similar greetings among villagers of Orašac in central Serbia (see Halpern 1967 [1956]: 293).

In our region, we didn't do agriculture. We were more animal herders in the countryside, but nothing much. For example, my grandmother – she had only one cow and she was selling milk to the local women, but we didn't have a lot of it. But my grandfather, he was working for a railway company. We also had a small garden, but we would plant there some strawberries or something else that we needed, but nothing for selling outside our household. That is the difference between us and *Semberci*, but it is the kind of difference that changes things, and changes life... a lot. Agriculturalist need to spend whole summer in the fields if they want to earn enough to live comfortably. It means there is no travelling, there are no summer holidays for them. Also, it is not easy to buy for one household a tractor and a car. So they used to buy a tractor, because they needed it, and a car, only if they had some extra money. And if you have animals – who is going to take care of them until you return from your holidays? With us, it was different. We just used to lock our house and go wherever we wanted. We had our working hours – when we go and when we come back from work. And if you wanted to have that kind of job, you needed to get educated, to master some crafts, at least. And all these are the things that make a difference between us. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

People who came to Bijeljina, they didn't live from agriculture. We didn't need to get up at four in the morning to go to the fields, we didn't plant peppers, tomatoes, cabbage... Some 70, or 80 per cent of our population was employed in different firms and factories. Tuzla and Srebrenik were industrial cities. I could change as many as three factories in a year, I could just apply to different positions which were advertised in local newspapers. The local population here in Semberija is wondering how come that we could build so nice and so big houses, to build entire neighbourhoods... They cannot understand how we have money for all that. But they are people who are used to do agriculture, they earn money working in the fields and selling their goods in the peasant market. Before the war, they were coming to our region, bringing to us these agricultural goods – watermelons, peppers, what not. And we had such a good salaries that we could buy every month new furniture for the house – that's how much we were earning. So people sold it after the war, and they brought that capital here in Semberija. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

Many of my interlocutors would spend considerable time describing what their pre-war places of residence looked like, trying to depict these places' higher level of urbanity in

comparison to what they found in Bijeljina upon forcible displacement. The urbanity of Bijeljina IDPs' pre-war residences and their lifestyle more generally, has become an important indicator of otherness in the local Bijeljina society, and an important aspect of their presumed cultural superiority in relation to the local population in Semberija. Here is how an author of a book written in a memory of the lost homeland of Ilijaš described his pre-war *zavičaj*:

Our villages were urban environments with paved streets, electrification, drinkable water and sewage system, houses with telephone connection, TV devices, pretty furniture, cars, etc. These were not villages in the classical sense. These were suburban settlements with rich crop, fruit and cattle production. One salary in a factory, another from agriculture. Such accomplished and inherited wealth gives us the right to say that we lived in prosperity, which has given us great intellectuals: doctors, engineers, professors, artists, writers, journalists, great businessmen and politicians (Bodiroga, 2013: 13).

Arrival to Bijeljina has not changed the working habits of these IDPs, neither the lifestyle that comes with it. Bijeljina IDPs still prefer having eight-hour workday, regular winter and summer holidays, and they enjoy in everyday leisure activities, including socializing with their relatives and friends, that *Semberci*, in their opinion, have little or no time for. Understandably, land is not of big importance for Bijeljina IDPs. Although some of them could afford to buy sizable plots of land at the time when they were starting their life in Bijeljina, most of them chose not to, as this is not what their life looked like in their pre-war places of residence. Some of my interviewees told me that they have tried to plant vegetables for their own use, but they have been unsuccessful year after year, because they simply did not know how to take care of them:

In Tuzla, we were all working in big firms, because Tuzla was an industrial centre. And then when we finish with work for a day, what could we do? We would invite our friends to meet, to spend some time together, to socialize and have some fun. In Semberija, there is no such a thing, and it is normal, it is due to practical reasons. They are in the fields from the early morning until evening, and they just can't wait to go home and have some rest. When for some time I lived in Semberija's countryside after displacement, I didn't need an alarm clock to wake me up in the morning to go to the work. My alarm clock were farmers on

their tractors, passing in front of my house every morning, going to the fields. So, they haven't really had time to socialize. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Semberci are diligent people, hard-working people. But we were too. It doesn't matter that we didn't have fields, all of us were doing some work, in addition to our regular jobs. My husband and I, we worked in very good, big companies before the war, where the salaries were among the best in the city. Plus, my husband would go to Germany and work from time to time, so he earned some additional money. We enjoyed spending money, but we were diligent too, we worked hard so that we can spend everything we earn. So, if I don't like working in the fields, doing some agricultural work, it doesn't mean I am not diligent. It is just that I am not used to that kind of work. I tried to plant some onions in my garden, but I couldn't take good care of them. I would rather go and clean other people's houses than do this kind of work. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Once I went to a village to buy a piglet from a local man. Although he was my age, he looked at least 15 or 20 years older than myself. The fields have consumed him completely [*njiva ga pojela*]. He said to me he has 5,000 tomato plants. And I am bored to plant 30 in my garden, and imagine that he has as many as 5,000?! [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Semberci are somehow at lower cultural stage because they do agriculture, and we came from some developed, more cultured industrial centres. Look at this example: when Muslims from Janja left their homes, some *izbjeglice* came to live in their houses, from Vareš, from Zenica, from many different places... The fields they took alongside the houses, they got completely neglected, because they didn't know what to do with them. Now if you gave me tractors, fields, all I need for agriculture, I wouldn't be able to do it – I don't know when and how I am supposed to do these things. That's not my cup of tea [*nisam iz te priče*]. Now that Muslims have returned to Janja, everything looks so good and taken good care of, just like before the war, because these people... they are agriculturalists. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Also, as one of the excerpts above illustrates, some of my interviewees told me that their Bijeljinan neighbours do not understand how IDPs can enjoy a relatively comfortable

life without working as hard as the locals do. In their words, the locals envy *izbjeglice* for being capable of taking care of themselves without –what it seems to them– too much sacrifice and physical effort. The presupposed jealousy of the local population with regards to the newcomers’ advanced way of life is a frequent source of humorous comments among Bijeljjan IDPs:

You know, there is a joke among us, how a little boy says to his *Semberci* parents how he wants to become a refugee. And they would ask him why would he like something like that to happen? And then he says: ‘Look at us, going to the fields, working hard every day, tired and exhausted, and our neighbour-*izbjeglica* is barbequing all day long, and he is still doing fine!’ [laughs] [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

However, majority of my interviewees from the category of the local population actually praised IDPs for being in position to find different ways for obtaining wealth and securing a relatively easy-going life. They also mentioned that thanks to the IDPs and their newly-built ‘refugee settlements’, villages in Semberija have somehow been reborn, and the locals have gradually learnt how important is to socialize and enjoy in various forms of entertainment. Some of my interviewees from the category of Bijeljjan IDPs shared this viewpoint:

Since I moved here from Brčko in 2000, this village has advanced a lot. Some things they saw how we are doing, so they started doing them, too. Their houses were old, and ugly, and shabby, about to fall down, and then they started taking more care of them. Also, in agriculture, regarding their technology... I think the locals have benefited from our arrival. We are people of industry. Only in my town we had factories such as *TAS*, *Pretis*, *Energoinvest*, but here, nothing but agriculture. And what agriculture? It was passive, underdeveloped... I saw their tractors before, and I see them now. They have advanced a lot in the meantime. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

7.2.1.2. Family and neighbourly relations

Agriculture has left its marks on family and neighbourly relations, too. Having in mind behaviours, values, and attitudes that are considered appropriate for both male and

female, Bijeljina IDPs think that women in Semberija are much more hard-working than women from their regions. Sometimes it is praised as a virtue, especially because the local women keep their households extremely neat and clean, but in most cases the IDPs believe that Bijeljina men are exposing their wives and daughters to the amount of work that is very often inappropriate for women. Somewhat older IDPs explained to me that women from their regions also needed to be exemplary housewives, but, unlike *Semberke* [women in Semberija], they have also been encouraged to dress nicely, wear a huge amount of golden jewellery, and engage in various social activities, such as daily coffee-drinking routine with their immediate female neighbours:

I didn't even realize until recently how women here in Semberija are seriously, seriously, engaged in a hard work. The hard work has consumed them entirely, and they look exhausted. I can understand that they have to work in agriculture, but not that they need to be a true bearer of all the difficult labour in a household, to do jobs which are, and those which are not, for them. [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Semberci are hard-working people. Here women are working much harder than our women are. I wouldn't say they are more capable than our women to host you in their houses, but they are really diligent. Women in Semberija are really taking care that their households are clean and neat, they plant nice flowers, and many women take care of animals, too. Our women, on the other side, they take care of themselves mostly, to look pretty and nice. I believe we've got it from Muslims. Our women like to be in the house, nicely dressed, to wear a lot of nice, golden jewellery and to drink coffee with their neighbours. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Being educated is another important characteristic which my interlocutors frequently stress that Bijeljina IDPs possess, unlike the majority of the local population in Semberija. When it comes to their educational level and its importance for the local community, those IDPs from Sarajevo and Tuzla were showing a particularly strong superior attitude towards IDPs from other regions, and especially towards the local population. According to this opinion, being educated means not only being 'smarter' and intellectually superior in relation to others, but also more presentable, or 'prettier', as the excerpt below suggests. Some of my interlocutors felt that Semberija and *Semberci* as such either did not possess the necessary capacity to absorb the incoming

intellectuals, or were threatened by the possibility of losing power in the local society, so they discouraged these intellectuals from remaining in Bijeljina:

Bijeljina was a small town, *varošica*⁷². And then, out of sudden, a sea of people arrived to that small town. And these people were not some guests which were going to stay for two or three days and then return home. So, in a small Bijeljina, a sea of people arrives, and these were some new people, some different people. Local people, people born in Semberija, they fight hard so that a mayor is always one of their own. The politicians are frightening the local people with the stories that if they don't vote for a *Semberac* as a mayor, some *izbjeglica* will come and take that position, so they need to stick together. It is really like this. But it is only a question of day when this practice will stop, because it's simply unsustainable. There are so many of us, from all sides. Take Tuzla as an example. Many engineers and doctors came to Bijeljina from Tuzla. Tuzla was the centre of the North-East Bosnia. So, *Semberci* were probably saying how until their arrival, *they* were the 'smartest in their village', and then somebody much prettier, smarter and more educated came. Such people got scared first. That is the fact. A wave of educated people came, intellectuals, it would be logical if they immediately said: 'You won't go anywhere from here. Let us see what you are capable of. Let us fill in the positions in hospitals. If there are too many doctors among you, let us build another hospital.' But they were afraid that *izbjeglice* would start governing their city, their municipality, so they let many of them go to Serbia, or abroad. [Mihajlo (39), 12 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Bijeljina was a small town that did not manage to absorb all the urban population that arrived here with some different habits and different lifestyle. Here people are engaged in agriculture and us, even if we did, that was some ultra-minimal percentage of what people are doing here. People in Semberija are hard-working, but maybe they did not manage to get educated enough, because that land and that hard work of theirs did not let these people to pursue higher education, even those who really wanted so. [Sanja (42), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

According to Bijeljinan IDPs, the male offspring in Semberija is expected to remain in their parents' house and continue agricultural activities. For this reason, they believe

⁷² *Varoš* [diminutive: *varošica*] is a word that has roots in Hungarian language and it means a town, a small urban settlement. *Varošica* represents a smaller settlement, something in between a village and a town.

that the locals do not encourage their children to obtain higher education, because this would mean that they would probably leave the household, and parents would lose the necessary workforce. Whether seeing it as a practice that does or does not have potential for change, large majority of my interlocutors thought that *Semberci* do not care much about being educated:

Here I don't see anybody trying to get rid of that field, to move forward in life. Even during the war, I struggled to educate my children, I couldn't do it easily, but I wanted to, I wanted them to become *somebody*. But here some young men, maybe 16 or 18 years old, all they know to talk about is how much corn they harvested last year, what's the price of piglets these days, is their sow supposed to farrow or not, how much are cows and bulls, and I don't know what... That's their way of thinking, and their parents in Semberija encourage them to do so. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Here in Semberija everybody is saying how they have accomplished something, and I am looking around and asking myself whether someone is going to universities, for example... But no, they are just working as drivers, or they are firemen, or waiters and waitresses, or something like that... All due respect, but nobody educates their children. And my children, they went through the war, and they managed to get university degrees, because I wanted them to, although it was not easy to support them financially. [Veljko (68), 20 November 2016, Bijeljina]

Agriculture is dying slowly, I can see more and more people giving up on it. And their youngsters, they all want to go to the city, to study in Belgrade and Novi Sad, to get educated, because nobody wants to do hard agricultural work anymore. Why? Because they saw how, for example, my son and my daughter do not work in the fields, do not go to water peppers and tomatoes every morning, and how we still live normally and happily on our 700 quadrat metres of land. *Semberci* can't get it how hard they are working, and still, their work is not worth that much. So, they are a bit jealous of us, of our overall resourcefulness [snalažljivost]. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

As far as daughters in Semberija's agricultural families are concerned, similarly to what Loizos (1999) emphasized in the case of Cretan Muslim refugees and local Muslims in Bodrum, or Köker (2003) in the case of Muslim refugees from Greece displaced near

Izmir in Turkey, Bijeljina IDPs would also very often joke that the locals are not happy to have an *izbjeglica* as a daughter-in-law, because she would be joining their family without being used to the hard work. On the other side, *Semberci* prefer to marry their daughter to an *izbjeglica* because this would ensure that she will enjoy a more comfortable and easy-going life:

Do you know what do we usually say? *Mještani* are praying to God that their daughters get married to an *izbjeglica*, but they are cursing their sons if they bring home a girl who is *izbjeglica*. [laughs] They like marrying daughter to an *izbjeglica* because there is no land to be cultivated in that family, no corn, no peppers, nothing. But poor that girl that marries a local boy, she needs to do all the hard work, and she has no idea how to! [laughs] [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I know some girls from *Semberija* that got married to *izbjeglice*, here in my immediate neighbourhood. And they say how they don't like going to visit their mothers, not even for a coffee, because as soon as they arrive to their family house, their mothers start saying: 'Ah, it's so good that you came, you have to help me with chicken, then you have to help me with some other job, then with some other...!' And then these girls say how lucky they are with their mother-in-laws, and how much they enjoy households of *izbjeglice*! [laughs] We have a different way of life, we like to give ourselves some credit, to sit and relax every now and then. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Bijeljina IDPs believe that land has an unnecessarily big impact on the local population, admitting that they were negatively surprised to see that people in *Semberija* are capable of getting into fight with their own kin due to disputes over a piece of land. IDPs think that neighbourly relations in *Semberija* are much less honest and warm than what these IDPs were used to have in their pre-war places of residence. While some of my interlocutors admitted that this could be the result of the locals' hard and demanding agricultural work, where there is simply not too much time left for regular social interactions and activities, majority of them simply blamed *Semberci's* antisocial and selfish mentality. For example, IDPs mentioned that their neighbours in *Semberija* engage in everyday conversations over the fence which separates their households, or they are sitting in front of their yards greeting other neighbours and passers-by,

avoiding to invite them inside for a cup of coffee or a glass of *rakija*⁷³, thus keeping themselves away from more meaningful relationship with their neighbours and friends, or avoiding to treat them with food or drinks. According to Bijeljina IDPs, this was unimaginable in their pre-war villages, where all they did was look for an opportunity to participate in casual gatherings with their neighbours, whether as guests or as hosts:

We are not used to be selfish. Whatever we have, we will share it with others. We like to socialize, we like for people to come to our house, while *Semberci* – they are not really like that. They often do not talk to their neighbours, they are jealous, they argue among themselves because of the land, because of the borderline between their fields. They even go as far as to kill each other because of that land. I know of some cases where two brothers are in fight and do not talk to each other because of that borderline. You can't find these things among *izbjeglice*. We are not so preoccupied with that land, because it means nothing to us. We don't need it, so why should we take a lot of it? Maybe a small plot for a holiday home [*vikendica*] or something, but that's all. [Tijana (30), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

There are many things here in Semberija that I needed a lot of time to get accustomed to, because we stand on the two opposing poles when we speak of mentality, customs, behaviour. We are, for example, much more hospitable. If we drink coffee with somebody, we truly drink it, we sit and socialize over that cup of coffee. In Semberija, as soon as I come to somebody, they offer you coffee to drink it quickly, literally while still standing, so that I can leave fast. It is not like that in our region. We had all sorts of socializing events, but here, they maintain social relationships over the fence. In the morning, neighbours would say a word or two over the fence which separates their yards, and that would be all. [Danka (59), 27 September 2016, Novi Dvorovi]

Neighbours here in Semberija, they can stand for hours over their fences and talk to each other. One old man who is *izbjeglica* often tells them that if they were *real* men, they wouldn't be making little wooden benches in front of their yards, towards the street. We are making benches for sitting inside our yard, so when neighbour passes through the street, we invite him to come in and sit with us, while *Semberci* make benches literally on the road so that they don't need to treat you with any drinks and food, as you are not in their very yard. [laughs] If

⁷³ *Rakija* is a popular fruit brandy, in Semberija usually produced from plums.

they wanted to treat their neighbours with *rakija*, they would made these benches in their yards. What to say – they are not really sociable. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Semberci are always thinking should they invite you in their house or not. It is not maybe that they do not want to have your as their guest, but they were a bit less sociable because of the nature of their work. If they sat and socialized during the day, there would be no one to take care of their household and their fields. I respect that. Whoever lives of their ten fingers and their work in the field only, they deserve my respect. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

As the excerpts above show, Bijeljinan IDPs largely question *Semberci's* hospitality [*gostoprinstvo*], which, in turn, questions the reputation of their individual households and their very value as the members of the local community. Such a stance of Bijeljinan IDPs resembles Bringa's (1995) findings from the village of Dolina in the central Bosnia, where a particular household gained social standing from the way it received its guests (*častiti* – the verb for offering hospitality has the same etymology as the word for honour – *čast*), and where serving food and drinks was an important aspect of treating a guest. Bijeljinan IDPs are also of an opinion that in Semberija there is a strong reciprocity rule regarding helping neighbours in their everyday activities (as much hours and effort a neighbour gives to me, I am going to return neither less nor more). Such a practice of the local population in Semberija is again similar to the practices of villagers from Dolina, where hospitality among neighbours was considered as a form of social exchange, and where voluntary actions of individuals were motivated by the returns these actions were expected to bring (Bringa 1995).⁷⁴ According to Bijeljinan IDPs and their understanding of what good neighbourly relations should look like, it would be disgraceful to calculate beforehand any acts of kindness:

When I was displaced to Semberija's countryside, neighbours would notice if I didn't burn fire in my house for a day, because there would not be smoke coming out from chimney. They notice as soon as I am not at home, but when I am, I am sitting alone in my house or yard for days, and they would never come to me to sit and chat together or to see if I am well. Only some greetings over the fence.

⁷⁴ On the idea of 'open' and 'closed' space in rural Bosnia (as in the use of the trope of 'opened' and 'closed' doors of the house), and its relations to the processes of communal life and hospitality as an area of ritualized exchange of intimacy and respect, see Henig, David (2012): "Knocking on my neighbour's door": On metamorphoses of sociality in rural Bosnia", *Critique of Anthropology* 32 (3), p. 3-19

That's something I missed – a bit more intimate relationship, a bit more socializing, some more meaningful relationship with my neighbours. But here in village, everything is about reciprocity – if you came to me, I will go to you, or they even get into fight if one gave more than the other returned to him. That's something we don't have. If I gave you something, I gave it from my heart, and you don't need to return that very same thing or favour to me. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

My interlocutors who not only came to Bijeljina from rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but used to be agriculturalists themselves before the war, were also very critical of the local population's lifestyle and established neighbourly relations. Their objection concerning the locals' lack of sociability and hospitality was, to some extent, reversed from the above comments, as it did not target *Semberci's* presumed backwardness, but their more developed state in agricultural production. Thus, according to this opinion, *Semberci* do not know how to enjoy in life (or, as the excerpt below says, "they have forgotten to sing") due to mechanisation and other advanced methods they use in agriculture. Additionally, they do not have time to socialize because agriculture is their primary calling, which has forced them to become devoted to it on an everyday basis, thus making them alienated from traditional rural lifestyle and estranged from their closest neighbours and friends:

We were doing some agricultural activities before the war. We lived in a rural region, in a village. But here in Semberija it is different, there is a lot more mechanisation. People needed it, to do their work more easily. But you know what? In this fact lies Semberija's biggest misfortune – because of these tractors, *Semberci* have forgotten to sing while working! [Branko (83), 10 December 2017, Dvorovi]

There *are* differences in mentality. Here in Semberija first [closest] neighbours do not know each other. It's really the truth. They really know each other only superficially, and even when they do know each other, they are full of jealousy. Our people, we have always been friendlier, more diligent, and we socialized much more. I have an explanation for this. That rural region of ours, nobody could even walk through the village that you don't ask him how is he, if he is tired, and that you do not invite him to sit and rest. It truly was like this. Here, when you pass through the village, you greet them with 'good afternoon', and they are looking at you as if you were crazy. Here people did not used to visit

each other so much... In our village, probably not many people were passing by, and people wanted to hang out, they were eager to hear some news, some stories... So, that's maybe why we enjoyed socializing more. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

7.2.1.3. Organisation of households

Many Bijeljinar IDPs told me that they were negatively surprised to see that most of the local *seljaci* in Semberija keep their livestock in an immediate proximity of their very houses. Although some of these IDPs also originate from rural areas, the organisation of their households differed considerably when compared to their neighbours in Semberija. According to these IDPs' stories of their pre-war lives, they also possessed stables and held domestic animals, but they used to pay special attention to keep them on a considerable distance and strictly separated from their living space, in order to avoid having unpleasant smell and filth all over the place. Some of my interlocutors not only saw the rural households in Semberija as poor, dirty, and primitive, but even criticized the local population for not being truly aware of their backwardness, and for not willing to improve such state of affairs:

The locals tend to say how we have lived better than they have, even when we just arrived here. One friend of mine who is *Semberac* usually comes and says to me: 'I have a yard of 3 *dunums*, and still it is messy, I can't find things when I am looking for them, and look at you – 200 quadrat metres and everything is orderly and pretty!' [laughs] Well, yes, I am wearing slippers when I go to pick up wood outside the house, because I've covered my yard in concrete.⁷⁵ But locals, they don't do it in this way. Once I went to a local man to buy a piglet for Christmas, and he gave me boots to wear, so that I could walk through his yard and go to the stable. There was mud everywhere! I am wondering why is it so hard to put something on the ground so that there is no such a mud all over the place... I had a cow and a stable before the war, but I walked through my yard normally, the

⁷⁵ Čapo-Žmegač (2007: 102) documented the very same remark made by the Croatian migrants from Srijem (Serbia) to Gradina (Croatia), for whom walking in slippers in their yards –as they used to do in their pre-displacement homes where the yards were nicely paved– was taken as a marker of their identity, which presupposed their higher development and cultural superiority in relation to the local Croat population in Gradina.

ground was made of concrete. My mother was going with slippers to the stable.
[Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

In our region, people who had animals, they used to build stables far away from the house. They built it in a way so that it is not clearly visible from your yard, or from the street. And here, everything is connected – a house next to a stable. Some people even put a door in between so they can go from the house to the stable straight away. [...] We also lived in a village, but we took care that everything is clean, that we have concrete on the ground... Here in villages it is a bit different. Not everywhere, of course, but mostly it is. [Marina (29), 19 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Due to the nature of my job, I've had the opportunity to go through many villages in Semberija. These villages were the strangest thing to me, compared to what I used to see before the war, in my pre-war place of residence. Probably in our villages too, there were these old, village-people, and such kind of households, but maybe I just didn't have the opportunity to see and meet them when I was younger. Nevertheless, the standard of life was higher there. Before the war, I don't remember that I had ever been in a house where the hosts did not have a bathroom. But here in Semberija, you can still see it. And what I've also noticed is that people here in Semberija don't even consider it their priority. That's the difference in our mentalities, I guess. Houses that we lived in before the war were usually built on some small plot of land, we had daily jobs, and we lived a kind of a city life, even if it was a house, and not an apartment. [Ksenija (39), 25 August 2016, Bijeljina]

One of my interlocutors even complained about seeing domestic animals being kept in cages in Semberija's villages, while in his pre-war village they used to walk freely and eat more natural and healthy food. Animal breeding in Semberija is profit-oriented, which makes the quality of food lower:

Life in this plain is easier, and I like it. But it is monotonous, I prefer my mountains and I miss my hills, my mountain spring water, to sit under some tree, in shade. I like those views when you see sheep and cows around in pastures. Here in Semberija, they keep all animals closed in cages, there is no free animal to be seen. Chicken are in cages, pigs too, they just feed them so that they can sell them. There is no nature, there are no natural things, and no healthy food.
[Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Many IDPs also noticed that, although many locals have built very pretty and large houses, they still choose to live in some supporting facilities, which are in these villages known as *ljetne kuhinje* [literally: summer kitchens]. *Ljetne kuhinje* are small buildings in which women in Semberija used to cook during summer months because it was easier to arrange housework in this way during the periods of intensive work in the fields. Except for the area for cooking, there were also several beds on which they could rest or take a nap in between different outdoor jobs. By choosing to cook and rest in these supporting facilities, *Semberci* and *Semberke* would ensure that the main house is kept clean and neat. Bijeljina IDPs told me that the locals are jealous of beautiful houses and nicely organized small estates which IDPs possess, but they believe it is the locals' fault, because they are not enjoying in their own properties, but are choosing to live in *ljetne kuhinje* instead. According to my interlocutors, this is one additional proof of different lifestyles of *izbjeglice* and *Semberci*. *Izbjeglice* are not afraid of hard work, but they also know how to enjoy in all those things that such a hard work ensures. They think that the locals build large houses, buy expensive vehicles and tools, and keep their yards neat, not to enjoy in the fruits of their labour, but just in order to show off:

A lot of people in Semberija's countryside work really hard their entire life, and they still don't have some nice houses. And all *izbjeglice* have built very nice houses. So *Semberci* are wondering how? So they say that *izbjeglice* have probably stolen money [laughs]. They can't understand how they have been working hard for so long and still can't afford to build such a nice house, and *izbjeglice*, who've lost everything, have managed. But *Semberci* are somehow not thinking a lot about providing such things for themselves. Even those who have built big houses, they tend to live in *ljetne kuhinje*. So they obviously didn't even need those big houses in the first place if they were not going to use them. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Semberci have always strived to make a good house for themselves. And they indeed build very nice houses, but they do not have time to enjoy in them... I understand it, they are under a lot of pressure because of their hard work. They spend more time in some small *ljetne kuhinje*, because they don't want to make their houses dirty. Who have you built them for, then, if *you* are not the one enjoying in them? [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Sometimes I have a feeling like *Semberci* would love more if their former neighbours-Muslims remained here, instead of us, *izbjeglice*, coming to Bijeljina. *Semberci* are all the time wondering how we have managed to get to our own two feet after displacement, how have we built houses, and how every family has a nice car... They can't get it how come that somebody who was displaced has 50 thousand marks to build a house, and they cannot do it for themselves even after so many decades of living here... But they love more to live in *ljetne kuhinje* than to step into their house, not to make it dirty. They are keeping these houses intact, for what, for whom? I want to sleep in my house, to rest, to live there. So, I sometimes see that they are jealous of us, of our way of life. [Sreten (60), 25 August 2016, Nova Janja]

7.2.1.4. Customs

As far as various customs are concerned, the most frequently mentioned differences between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice* refer to their annual *slava* celebration, which represents a Serbian Orthodox Christian tradition of the ritual glorification of a family's patron saint. According to my interviewees, while certain *slava* rituals (such as attending the church, serving a dish of minced boiled wheat [*žito* or *koljivo*], baking the special ritual bread [*slavski kolač*], and lighting the special *slava* candle [*slavska svijeća*]) are more or less the same in all Serbian families, it seems that the locals' close connection to the land and agricultural work have made their *slava* customs in many respects different from those of Bijeljina IDPs.

First of all, in Serbian tradition the general rule is that the family saint is inherited from the head of the household (that is, from father to son), while women inherit the patron saint of their husbands upon leaving their families. In Semberija, the same rule is in place, but there also exists a closer relationship between *slava's* inheritance and land, in other words – *slava* is inherited with the very land. Even after he marries and forms his own family, a son usually remains living in the same household with his parents and keeps cultivating the same land. With the land, he inherits the family *slava* too. Practically, the rules that a son inherits *slava* from his father, and that *slava* is inherited with the land, coincide in this case. However, if it happens that a son marries and leaves his family house (that is, goes and lives on his wife's land), he is going to celebrate the

patron saint that has been celebrated on his wife's property, i.e. the *slava* of his father-in-law.

Bijeljnan IDPs explained to me that *slava* celebrations in their places of origin usually presupposed three-day feasts in which guests were welcomed at any time of day or night, and were encouraged to stay for as long as they wish. The host is not allowed to sit at the table, but is constantly serving the guests, taking care that all of the glasses are always filled up. The lady of the house pays attention that table is filled with a variety of food which is being served all at once. *Pita* –a flaky pastry filled with different ingredients, such as minced meat, cheese, potatoes, greens, and mushrooms, traditionally rolled in a spiral and cut into sections for serving– is a must-item on the menu. The *slava* celebrations in pre-war homes of Bijeljnan IDPs are perfect occasions for family and friends to socialize through eating, drinking, and very often – singing. The *slava* customs vary from region to region, sometimes from village to village, and I have heard many different specificities depending on where my interviewees originate from. For example, some of my interlocutors from central Bosnia are lightening three instead of one *slava* candle, and baking three instead of one *slava* bread, continuing with as many as twelve ritual toasts, proposed by both a male host and his guests at the table. At these *slava* gatherings, men and women are usually being seated and served in separate rooms of the host's house. The *slava* celebrations of some of my interlocutors from the wider region of Sarajevo included ritual welcoming of guests with bread, salt and *rakija*, as well as ritual hand washing before the main *slava* meal.

In Semberija, these celebrations are a bit different. My interlocutors from the category of displaced population mentioned that life of an agriculturist demands a lot of sacrifice and hard work, which have forced people in Semberija to pay less attention to various protocols and rituals that celebration of one's *slava* requires. According to Bijeljnan IDPs, to Semberci, *slava* celebration seems to be more like an obligation that needs to be fulfilled, than a pleasure that is happily shared with one's relatives and friends. Guests are asked to come at a certain time, food is served as a three-course meal, and in between the meals the table usually remains empty. In IDPs' view, an empty table in front of the guests is considered to be rude and disrespectful. There is no singing and no ritual toasts either. They explain such a custom through the locals' preoccupation with daily chores, which very often cannot wait for variety of *slava* protocols to be performed. *Semberci's* everyday responsibility towards the land and livestock is

probably making them behave as if they were in a constant hurry, even on the day of their family's patron saint:

In *Semberija*, every *slava* presupposes specific course meals: you have soup, then you have meat and tomato sauce, then *sarma* [stuffed cabbage rolls], and in the end you have *pečenje* [roasted pork meat]. Of course, sweets come in the very end, after everything. As soon as it is done, guests are expected to get up and leave. But up there in my *rodni kraj*, we put everything at once on the table, and only add certain things when we see they are about to be gone. There on our *slava*, we have twelve different toasts – for *slava*, for the saint, for our health and prosperity... We talk, we sing, and nobody is getting up, we are all sitting for as long as we want. *Pita* is a necessity. [...] I remember *slava* of my family before the war – we celebrate St. Nicolas in December. Our relatives and godparents would come from another village, spend three days at *slava*, eating, drinking, and having fun... That's how it was. [...] And *Semberci* don't have time for all of this, they have their fields and animals to take care of. [Uroš (66), 14 December 2017, Bijeljina]

There are so many things that I have accepted in this *Semberija* over time. But there are also some I would never accept. For example, the way they celebrate certain events, like *slava*. I don't like it that they are telling me at what time I am supposed to come to *slava*. Like, I should come for lunch, or for dinner. If I invited somebody, my guests should come whenever they can, they are welcome whenever, even if it is in the middle of the night. I celebrate St. Elijah, it is in summer, the days are long and nights short, and many guests stay during the whole night for my *slava*. [...] In *Semberija*, people are in a hurry non-stop. They can't relax on *slava* because they have animals to feed and fields to take care of. I have to admit that I am not a supporter of that. I don't support that you leave your *slava* and go to check on your animals. That meal you make that day, you don't just offer it to your saint-protector, but you also need to give all of yourself to him and to that sacred day, to host everybody who wants to share with you that special occasion, to share what you prepared for that day... And the fact is that *Semberci* really prepare a lot of food and everything for that day, there is everything in abundance. But they don't enjoy in it. [Milovan (68), 29 September 2016, Bijeljina]

One neighbour of mine, *Semberac*, asked me: 'Do you sing during your *slava*?' And I tell him: 'What kind of *slava* is it if people do not sing?' He says how he would like if they sang during his *slava* too, but it is not their custom, and nobody does it. Another neighbour tells me: 'How come that you are making *pita* for your *slava*? To us, it is humiliating to serve *pita* on our *slava*!' And then I tell her: 'If you only knew how to make good *pita*, you wouldn't think in this way!' [laughs] Our *pita* is a specialty, our *pita* is our God. [Miloš (58), 26 August 2016, Bijeljina]

On the other side, the local population believes that Bijeljinan IDPs needed to celebrate their *slava* for three days because they lived in such remote mountainous areas, that it was practically impossible for their guests to arrive to the feast and leave it on the very same day. Moreover, *Semberci* think that keeping all the food on the table like Bijeljinan IDPs do, is not only looking unpresentable, but is also unhygienic. What they particularly do not understand is why Bijeljinan IDPs serve *pita* on such a sacred day. In *Semberija*, *pita* is not only connected to the Muslim cooking tradition, but is also considered to be a meal for the poor, something that farmers take to the fields as a sort of a nutritious, but cheap snack. As one of the excerpts above shows, Bijeljinan IDPs usually respond to this remark by saying that "if *Semberci* only knew how to make good *pita*, it would easily become their sacred meal, too".

Apart from *slava* celebrations where differences in customs are the most apparent, Bijeljinan IDPs quite mockingly talked about the local population's mourning rituals. They believed that *Semberci* express more devotion and more respect to a person after his/her death, than they did while this person was still alive. *Semberci*'s seemingly frequent commemorative events organized in memory of the deceased ones, Bijeljinan IDPs interpret as their selfish contest for inheritance at worst, or their distasteful need to show off at best:

The 'cult of the dead' is much more present here in *Semberija* than in any other region. I usually say how it is easier for a man to die, than that somebody close to him dies. There are so many expenses – except for funeral, they mark three days after death, than sometimes a week after death, then 40 days, then half a year, and then a year. And *Semberci* invite so many people to mark all these occasions. In our region, we would burry someone, mark 40 days, and then a year, and we would invite only very close family members. Here, when somebody dies, his family needs to go to the bank and take a loan, so that they can cover all these expenses – there's no other way. I am wondering why it is like this... Maybe

Semberci are more devoted to family, but I don't think so. They probably think more about heritage, who is going to inherit everything from the deceased one, and they are trying to show off. [Milenko (48), 11 January 2017, Bijeljina]

7.2.1.5. Popular religion

There is a general impression, among IDPs and locals alike, that people who resettled in Bijeljina after the war give more attention to religion and religious customs, which for some could be a sign that Bijeljinan IDPs have been not only 'bigger' or 'better' Orthodox believers than the local Bijeljinan population, but also 'bigger' and 'better' Serbs in general (see Chapter 6). While religious devotion has usually been linked to rural population and more traditional and backward lifestyle, in the era of strong ethno-national identifications and an undeniable link between religious authorities and ethno-national political elites, being 'religious' in Bijeljina, or at least expressing nominal confessional identification, has been seen as a virtue, and a sign of one's moral superiority.

Majority of my interviewees who are also newcomers to Bijeljina, explained to me that they were quite religious in the pre-war period as well, and that they have only continued this tradition in their new places of residence. They claim that even in the communist Yugoslavia they used to openly celebrate *slava* and other Christian Orthodox holidays (such as Christmas and Easter), go to church on a relatively regular basis, collectively attend certain annual religious festivals, and undergo fasting practices. They also used to strictly respect all Orthodox Christian saints, avoiding to do any hard work on the specific days prohibited by the church (so-called *crveno slovo*, a date designated by red colour in the religious calendar). Sunday, the 'Lord's Day', was the day when no household chores could be done. It used to go to such an extent that even food for that day needed to be prepared in advance (usually *pita*, prepared on Saturday, and only warmed up the day after). The interviewees from larger urban centres did not share the exact same experience as far as practicing different religious customs is concerned. This especially stands true for those who used to be the members of the Communist Party and who, due to their ideological beliefs or their need to preserve certain benefits or secure professional advancement, either did not have any religious involvement, or

were performing religious customs in secrecy. However, they used to keep in touch with customary religion through their parents and grandparents who were usually remaining in rural areas, closely connected to a more traditional way of life.

Majority of the interviewed IDPs think that people in Semberija are not as religious, and here too *Semberci's* connection to the land serves as a partial explanation for such state of affairs. They believe that it was harder to preserve various religious practices in the Semberija's plain, than it was in the mountainous regions where large majority of IDPs originates from. The official ideology of the Yugoslav state was penetrating harder in the mountainous villages and towns, some of which had reputation of notorious anti-Partisan and anti-communist centres. Also, Semberija's farmers could not afford to skip fulfilling their everyday responsibilities towards their property and livestock in order to visit a church, as they could not afford not to cultivate their land on *crveno slovo*, i.e. the day which celebrates an important Orthodox saint. Some believe that stakes were higher for those Serbs who, unlike people in Semberija, lived as minorities in multi-ethnic towns and villages. Their dedication to religious customs and practices could thus serve the purpose of preserving their ethnic and religious identity when these used to be under immediate threat:

In our villages in Majevisa, people were religious before the war, too. I remember fasting as a young boy, and how I couldn't wait for Sundays to go to the church. Now that I've learnt more about Semberija's countryside, I believe that Communism has left more traces in these villages than in my *rodni kraj*, for example. In Majevisa, we had a strong Chetnik movement, and here in Semberija it was not the case. [...] Probably it was easier to keep religion and tradition preserved in those remote mountainous regions. The enemies were not interested in occupying these regions so we were left on our own. [Nikola (36), 26 September 2016, Bijeljina]

Even before the war, we had respect for *crveno slovo*, for religious holidays, we paid very much attention not to work on Sundays. While here in Semberija, I've noticed that people don't respect it that much. Recently I started having more understanding for this, because my in-laws are agriculturalists. They simply need to work in the fields, whether it is a religious holiday or not. And I believe they are excused, and I don't think that God would punish somebody who is struggling to provide some basic means for his family's survival. But when we

just arrived to Bijeljina, I admit, we didn't have much understanding for such a practice. [Dragan (62), 10 December 2017, Bijeljina]

7.2.2. On (not) being a *seljak* in Bijeljina

The city-village, or the urban-rural cultural dichotomy, which has greatly dominated the relationship between local population and newcomers in Bijeljina, does not represent a new phenomenon. Such dichotomy had also existed in the period which predated the establishment of the First Yugoslavia (1918-1945), when the cities were controlled by the great imperial powers (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian) and were perceived by the rural population as foreign and oppressive, while, in return, townspeople saw villagers as ignorant and backward (Allcock 2002; Bougarel 1999). However, it was mostly due to the socialist ideology of the Second Yugoslavia (1945-1992) that the cultural gap between the city and the village has become the most apparent. 'Measuring' backwardness, or comparing who is a bigger *seljak* in contemporary Bijeljina, represents the continuation of this tension –or sometimes even open animosity– between urban and rural population and their established lifestyles, but it also, to some extent, offers evidence of the persistence of class divisions which came into existence during the fifty-years long communist regime in Yugoslavia.

The opposition between 'urban' and 'rural' was deeply rooted in cultural and sociological process of modernisation and industrialisation in the socialist Yugoslavia (Kolind 2008). Aiming to enter the modern world as soon as possible, the socialist Yugoslav leadership upheld essentially urban views regarding the nature and direction of the country's development, including attempts to overcome traditional prejudice against women, weaken church authority, and diminish all manifestations of nationalist sentiment. Such views deliberately stimulated departure of population from the perceived backwardness of the traditional rural society which Yugoslavia largely was at the end of the Second World War (Allcock 2000; Halpern 1975; Rusinow 1972). In addition, building socialism was explicitly linked to industrialisation, which was furthermore tightly connected with the rapid process of urbanization and, successively, to the population's large-scale abandonment of the countryside. Taking all this into

account, one of the effects of the socialist Yugoslav regime on urban-rural relationship has been the population's perception of the village and rural lifestyle as 1) backward and uncultured; 2) opposed to some of the basic concepts of communism, thus antagonistic towards the country's progress and modernization; and 3) undesirable and repulsive, as it accommodated the poorest population groups within the socialist Yugoslav society.

First, the key objective in national development policies of the communist countries, including Yugoslavia, was to formally terminate the rural (peasant) cultural patterns which were seen as an embodiment of the mentality, lifestyle and living conditions that the new socialist elite wanted to quickly and decisively leave in the past (Halpern 1966; Van de Port 1998). Formal education was given a primary role in the communist elite's efforts to raise the cultural level of population and bring it closer to the 'right', i.e. Western European, cultural standards. Without cultural renaissance, they believed, there could be no economic progress either (Trouton 1952). Therefore, being 'cultured' was first and foremost associated with higher education, from which some other forms of desirable cultural capital, such as manners, style, and value system, were directly derived (Bringa 1995; Jansen 2005). Residence in the urban centres which offered more educational opportunities and employment outside of agriculture, was thus considered more prestigious than the life of a peasant. Under such circumstances, Yugoslav peasants felt that it was *them* who needed to be accommodated not only into the industrialisation and its accompanying forms (which sometimes included pumping of resources from the rural areas to generate development in the towns), but into the newly-introduced social and cultural requirements of the ambitious socialist Yugoslav state, as well. With many of them not being able to do so, the cultural gap between the city and the village unavoidably deepened. Those who made it to the urban areas, on the other side, were blamed for the "peasantization of the city" (Simić 1973) or "ruralization of the town" (Halpern 1975), i.e. for bringing the rural values and peasant lifestyle into an urban environment, forcing the urbanites to adapt to these migrants' way of life, rather than the other way around.

Second, as the rural population largely consisted of private land-owners and producers who very often objected to some of the basic concepts of communism –such as the collectivisation of agriculture– the policymakers in the cities regarded this population as the 'last bastion of capitalism', and, therefore, as an obstacle to the

country's modernization and overall progress. For this reason, the Yugoslav communist elites had introduced numerous restrictions and administrative obstacles for private land-owners and producers, including the provisions under which they were forbidden to buy new agricultural mechanisation, were prohibited to use hired labour, or were obliged to sell their produce to the state enterprises under lower prices. Additionally, the self-employed peasants were given health insurance only in 1967, while pension insurance for this category of population was introduced as late as in 1979 (Šljukić and Janković 2015). Consequently, such inequalities between private peasant farmers and those employed in the socialist sector – the latter being in minority but largely favoured by the system, created a sense of confrontation between the state and the peasantry. Due to this position taken by the state, and helped by anti-rural values promoted through mass media and schools, a strong feeling of antipathy and contempt towards farming as an occupation and a way of life was created in the Yugoslav society (Allcock 2000, 2002; Halpern 1967 [1956], 1967).

And third, in spite of the formally declared egalitarianism, a general pattern of social stratification was very much noticeable in the socialist Yugoslavia, from the aspect of economic differences, differences in social power, as well as differences in the distribution of goods and services among different population groups (Allcock 2000). With the nation placing emphasis on industrial growth, Yugoslav working class [*radnička klasa*] held a leading position in the political system, as it was considered to be the fundamental force of the socialist society, and guarantee of the country's economic (therefore cultural, too) development (Archer 2014; Archer, Duda and Stubbs 2016). With working class being highly privileged as a group, Yugoslav farmers from the rural areas found themselves in disadvantaged economic position. A new social inequalities and stratification was created between “a closed proletarian aristocracy of those who made it to the city and factory” and “residual peasantry still too large to get rich and condemned to stay where they are” (Rusinow 1972: 11). Simić (1975) talked about differences between peasants, unskilled and skilled urban workers, and the professional and managerial classes. Pešić (1977, as quoted in Van de Port 1998: 48-49) distinguished four social strata in Yugoslav society, including peasants, the working class (skilled and unskilled workers), the urban middle-class (civil servants, intellectuals), and the political and economic leaders. Thus, primarily the peasants, but also the peasant-workers (those who worked in the city but lived in the countryside), as

well as the recent newcomers to the city from rural areas – the “peasant urbanites” (Simić 1975), occupied the very bottom of the social ladder as the poorest segment of the Yugoslav society. One more legacy of the socialist Yugoslav system, therefore, has been this undisputable link created between the categories of urban/rural origin and social class.

The evidence of this antagonism between urban and rural population and their established lifestyles, can be found in majority of excerpts used in the previous section of this chapter, whether collected from local Bijeljina’s news outlets, or among my interviewees themselves. The rivalry between the city and the countryside is evident in the comments of Bijeljinan IDPs from the web portal Info Bijeljina, whereby the presumed backwardness of the predominantly agricultural region of Semberija was epitomized in its “Ottoman-like rough and bumpy roads”, the absence of sewage system in the city, or the local population’s lack of knowledge “of what a taxi service is”. The comments that *Semberci* should not discuss political issues but should “go and plant some cabbage instead”, that they are “good for cabbage only, and nothing else”, even though “they have not managed to accomplish anything for one hundred years of their cabbage life”, stress Bijeljinan IDPs’ demeaning attitude towards peasants and peasant lifestyle, symbolically demonstrated through cabbage as one of the most prevalent agricultural commodity in Semberija. The rural population, on the other side, did not hide its aversion towards the city either. While rural *Semberci* were associated with dirt and mud (“there was mud everywhere!”, “here, everything is connected – a house next to a stable”, “here in Semberija, you can still see houses without a bathroom and people here in Semberija don’t even consider it their priority”), the townspeople who arrived to Bijeljina were characterized as arrogant, deceiving and manipulating („they want to present themselves as if they were some special race, above all the rest of us“, „they are not hesitating to deceive you“, „they are phonies and swindlers“). The comment that “Bijeljina did not have a chance to develop before the war because everything [it produced] needed to go to damn Sarajevo” exemplifies the remnants of the rural population’s dissatisfaction because their agricultural production used to be subdued to the needs of the country’s urban centres and urbanisation process in general.

In opposition to *Semberci* and their “cabbage life” stand “smarter, more educated, better-mannered [and] more cultured” *izbjeglice* from urban areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who despise the “*mahala* mentality”, i.e. lack of urban sophistication of the

local population, and their primitive taste in music. Above all, the newcomers to Bijeljina, particularly those from the largest urban centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina – such as Sarajevo and Tuzla, are irritated by the locals' supposed ignorance which gets primarily noticeable in their low educational level. More than any other personal characteristic or achievement, my interlocutors would stress their higher education as the most remarkable difference that separates *izbjeglice* from *Semberci*. The importance of being educated is yet another legacy of the official ideology of the socialist Yugoslav state, strongly associated with the urban middle-class population to whom, as Pešić (1977, as quoted in Van de Port 1998: 49) described, education and obtaining diplomas was one of the major goals, „because that is how members of the urban middle class try to secure their position in that class once they have attained it”. The statement of one of my interviewees that “even during the war, I struggled to educate my children, I couldn't do it easily, but I wanted to, I wanted them to become *somebody*”, reveals this important feature of the Yugoslav middle-class (and intellectuals in particular), which is manifested in their preoccupation with social progress, and their concern for the professional career and future of their children (Pešić, *ibid.*).

However, not all *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina could be associated with the urban Yugoslav middle-class and the former country's intelligentsia. Many of my interlocutors belonged to the category of peasant-workers, who used to work in the city's industrial sector while continuing to live in the village. Apart from providing the emotional security of remaining in a familiar social environment, the part-time involvement in agricultural production offered additional financial security in uncertain times, or, as one of the excerpts above stated, “one salary in a factory, another from agriculture”. What is more, being “the people of industry”, as my interlocutors would often say, provided certain benefits and ensured specific lifestyle that full-time agriculturalists in the rural areas were largely deprived of. These include, among other, frequent travelling and summer holidays (“we just used to lock our house and go wherever we wanted”), different consumption habits (“we had such a good salaries that we could buy every month new furniture for the house”), or different organisation of their households (“we also lived in a village, but we took care that everything is clean, that we have concrete on the ground”). The narratives of my interlocutors' pre-war lifestyle go in line with Halpern's (1975: 89) observation on the standard of living of peasant-workers in comparison to full-time agriculturalists, in which the peasant-worker households

“tended to invest more in building new homes, repairing old ones, and purchasing furniture, and to spend more for recreation”. Although many IDPs who belonged to the category of peasant-workers did not have higher educational level than peasants in Semberija, according to them, their specialized knowledge of different crafts, or their daily contact with the urban environment through their work in the industrial sector, made them more advanced and more cultured than the local Bijeljina population (“we had daily jobs, and we lived a kind of a city life”). Such a perception of the local peasants by the very similar category of peasant-workers, and the latter’s insistence on stressing how different they are, goes along the thesis (Blok 1998; Brewer 2001) that the more similar groups are in their values and aspirations, the more severe is the intergroup social competition, and the greater the need to emphasize the smallest differences between them. In peasant-workers’ opinion, the ‘minor difference’ between them and the local rural population, i.e. the former’s touch with urban lifestyle through their work in the city’s industrial sector, made them superior in cultural sense, which furthermore creates effective social boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or, as they put it, between ‘people of industry’ and ‘cabbage people’.

Of course, not all Bijeljina IDPs could be considered to be of urban origin (and by implication ‘cultured’), neither all the locals in Semberija could be characterized as rural population (and by implication ‘uncultured’). The perceptions based on urban-rural cultural dichotomy in Bijeljina represent overgeneralisations, or simplified stereotypical images of the cultural ‘other’, which refuse to take individual variations into account. Like any stereotyping process, such overgeneralizations between IDPs and locals in Bijeljina serve the purpose to define the boundaries of one’s own group, whereby this group is presented to be superior in relation to the other (Eriksen 2010 [1994]). Social psychology theories stress that strong identification and attribution of positive or superior identity to one’s own group leads to the in-group favouritism, but also to the attribution of different negative identities to other out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Hence, by creating and maintaining negative image of the cultural ‘other’, Bijeljina IDPs are simultaneously excluding themselves from such kind of categorization. Or, more concretely, while Bijeljina IDPs are portraying a local *Semberac* as *seljak* – meaning rural, backward, and uncultured, they are, at the same time, portraying themselves as urban, modern, and cultured. Such perception of others – and such perception of self in return, is an important element of defining the boundaries

of one's own group, which not only serves as a cohesive factor among the members of this group, but it can also indicate the group's superiority, and, by implication, its primacy in access to the local society's resources. In addition, through their discourses of cultural superiority in their new physical and social environment, Bijeljina IDPs are reconstructing the specific image they hold of themselves. This image is stemming out from the social status and social prestige they worked hard to obtain and/or maintain in their pre-war local societies, but which has been suddenly disturbed due to the war and forcible displacement. Therefore, although the urban-rural narrative is largely about the issue of social inequality, in reality it represents a stereotypical image of cultural 'other' that "lies in the minds" (Cogen 2001) of the members of one group. Rather than having the capacity to create deep social divisions within the local Bijeljina society, the categories of *seljaci* or 'cabbage people' on one side, and *izbjeglice* or 'people of industry' on the other, represent more the linguistic epiphenomenon which accompany this particular stereotyping process. In this sense, the social cleavage between 'war profiteers' and 'ordinary people' discussed earlier in this chapter, is far more incorporated in the social structure, and has far more reaching effect on creating and maintaining social inequalities among Bijeljina citizens.

Moreover, although widely used to boost collective self-esteem and/or to reinforce people's social position in the local society, the urban-rural stereotypes in Bijeljina seem to fail to create significant effect on individual relationships between locals (*Semberci*) and newcomers (*izbjeglice*). On individual level, the members of these two groups in Bijeljina have been the closest neighbours, the best friends, and loyal colleagues and business partners, while among the younger generations of *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, the intermarriages have become a common occurrence. This especially stands true for the urban core of Bijeljina, while in Semberija's countryside the locals and the newcomers have mostly established only superficial relationship with one another for the reasons other than the perceived level of each other's urbanity or rurality (see Chapter 5). Unless employed in a humorous manner within their close circle of friends and acquaintances, some of my mostly young and more educated interlocutors rejected the use of simplified stereotypical images of the other group:

Generally speaking, making divisions among people, it's a characteristic of a low intelligence in people. It's like they are looking for the explanation for their own failures in labelling the others as different or as worse than themselves. But, in

essence, these divisions... they have nothing to do with a common sense. [Boris (36), 7 December 2017, Bijeljina]

I used to hear the stories how *Sarajlije* can't stand people from Tuzla. I don't know it from my own experience, I've just heard it from other people. I really cannot say why *Sarajlije* cannot stand us from Tuzla, as well as why people from Tuzla cannot stand people from Sarajevo. Probably it has to do with different mentality. But even like that, I can't see the reason to hate each other, we are all Serbs after all. [Bojana (30), 18 August 2016, Bijeljina]

As far as the relationship between, as they like to say, domicile and displaced population is concerned (I wouldn't say that these are domicile or displaced population groups, but simply people who, due to specific social circumstances, happened to live with each other in the same geographical region), only in our heads we are making the barriers, because we are all the same people. I hear some *izbjeglice* complaining that locals are like this and that, but my question is: What would *you* be like, if it was *them* who came to *us* out of sudden? Let me tell you – you would be the same. So, you don't have right to complain. Nevertheless, these barriers in people's heads exist. They are not real, but they come out of one's unwillingness to open towards other people, to accept them, and become accepted by them in return. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

Through unavoidably frequent individual encounters, various 'minor differences' between the local and the displaced population have been losing on their relevance with the passage of time. In other words, the two groups have increasingly become mutually entangled and brought closer together, in terms of people's dialects, their lifestyles, or different customs and religious ceremonies, whereby the younger generations of both of these groups of Bijeljina population have taken the leading role within this ongoing converging process:

People who came to Bijeljina and their hosts are slowly getting closer to each other, getting married to each other – equally, I would say, boys and girls from both sides, which only shows that everything is blending together, everything is becoming one normal, natural whole. I chose a man from Semberija to baptize my children, although, in our tradition, I should have chosen an old family's godfather from my *rodni kraj*. But I didn't ask just for a godfather for my daughters, I asked for *a man*, who will be there for us for better or for worse, as I

would be there for him. What I want to say is that there is no 'my' *izbjeglica* and 'their' *Semberac*, there is only a good and a bad man. [Nenad (65), 24 August 2016, Bijeljina]

My children, when you ask them where are they from, they always say that they are *Semberci* and that they are proud of it. It's good that they know where they come from and where their roots are, but they live in Semberija now, what else are they, if not *Semberci*? I cannot take it from them, even if I wanted to. After all, being able to be many things at once, I think it's a blessing. [Stevan (63), 11 December 2017, Bijeljina]

Both of my children, but especially my older daughter, she has been working all around Bijeljina, visiting its countryside too, and she very often says: 'Mom, this Semberija, this is the most beautiful place'. She has visited some villages in Semberija where I have never been to, and she is always talking how beautiful they are. I try to speak often of the beauties of our *zavičaj*, I took her to see our *zavičaj*, as well. But no, she said, nothing can compare to Semberija. Our children... they've grown up here, they love it here, that's just the fact. [Olga (49), 19 November 2016, Nova Janja]

This sense of a slow, but still ongoing cultural convergence between locals and IDPs in Bijeljina offers the evidence of the situational and contextual character of social identities. Social identities are continuous *processes*, which are being negotiated and renegotiated within different social contexts and in relation to different social situations. The concept of *identification process* emphasizes this fluid and dynamic aspect of identity which is constantly being shaped and re-shaped due to new individual experiences, and diverse and ever-changing social circumstances (Eriksen 2004; Jenkins 2008 [1996]). Therefore, while expecting that their roots may not be forgotten, and their sacrifices never taken for granted, Bijeljinan *izbjeglice* are conscious of the fact that their grandchildren, if not their children already, might have a different sense of 'belonging' in not so distant future. This consciousness is sometimes expressed as a feeling of hopefulness, which, unlike hope for a 'normal life' (Jansen 2006, 2007, 2016) that have cemented their decision to resettle and move on with their lives after forcible displacement, is a *new form of hope* for a more socially and culturally unified 'future Semberija'. Like any other hope for the future (Kleist and Jansen 2016), this one too is

entangled with uncertainty, but this does not bring into question its simultaneous potentiality:

We can try to avoid admitting it as much as we like, but, in the end, we are all already *Semberci*. Our ID cards clearly say that Semberija is our address, our home. Probably there will be an additional period of felt differences among people, when we will be struggling to keep our *zavičaj* in our hearts and souls, but, that we will assimilate – we will, for sure. And to *Semberci* too, it means a lot to them that we have come, that there are so many young people who will somehow refine and enrich the native families in Semberija. It is precisely these young people who will be taking the best from both *izbjeglice* and *Semberci*, and the assimilation that will inevitably happen in this way – it will produce the best outcome we could all possibly hope for. [Zorana (49), 13 December 2017, Bijeljina]

This chapter addressed the question of what it means to be an internally displaced person in Bijeljina from the perspective of perceived differences between the members of the displaced group(s) of people and the local population in Bijeljina. It addressed the question of how the relationship between the locals (*Semberci*) and the newcomers (*izbjeglice*) in Bijeljina has developed since the newcomers' arrival to this city, and it did so by taking into consideration the two groups' competition over principal sources of power available in this particular local society, as well as the main cultural stereotypes which have been employed to designate the two groups in question. As far as the power competition is concerned, Bijeljinan IDPs feel as if they have been underrepresented in the local municipality's legislative and executive bodies, blaming the local population for occupying important political positions, which, in turn, opens more opportunities for making use of political connections for their own benefit. On the other side, local population believes that Bijeljinan IDPs have been holding the monopoly over business sector and professional services, and that their wealth, influence, and interconnectedness with political structures, enables them to practically rule from the shadows. Due to their number and influence, the newcomers from Sarajevo were given a special attention in this chapter, as a category of population which has been perceived

by the rest of the Bijeljina population both in terms of power competition in this particular social setting, as well as in terms of different cultural stereotypes used to create boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. As far as the main cultural stereotypes which have been employed to designate *Semberci* from *izbjeglice* are concerned, this chapter discussed the issue of the comparison of the two groups' level of urbanity (i.e. cultured-ness) and rurality (i.e. uncultured-ness), which represents the most significant aspect of Bijeljina IDPs' identification process. The urban-rural cultural dichotomy has played an important role in post-displacement identification strategies of Bijeljina IDPs, whereby the negative portrayal of the other, very similar group, served the purpose of enhancing IDPs' collective self-esteem and reconstructing the pre-displacement image they hold of themselves.

The following chapter will summarize the key findings and points made throughout this thesis, and offer final, concluding remarks regarding the main topic of this study and its main research questions.

8. Conclusions

This study addressed the question of interrelationship between social identity and forcible displacement of population which occurred as a result of the 1992-1995 armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It focused on social identity negotiation and renegotiation processes of displaced group(s) of Serbs in the north-eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina, who, after fleeing in fear or being forcibly expelled from the Bosniak- and Croat-controlled territories, decided *not to return* to their pre-war places of residence, but to resettle in their place of refuge. The study explored the question of how has the war and forcible displacement influenced this particular group(s)' sense of 'belonging' through their perception of self and other, and it did so by posing these two research questions:

- (3) What have been the identification strategies of the internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina in the context of their forcible displacement experience? How have the identities of these displaced persons been produced and reproduced in a new social and cultural setting?
- (4) What have been the identification strategies of the internally displaced Serbs in Bijeljina in relation to the local population? How have the notions of selves ('us') and other ('them') been expressed, and what purpose they served in this particular local setting?

In other words, the study posed the question of who Bijeljinan IDPs are in relation to their experience of forcible displacement, attempting to explore the manner in which identities of IDPs in Bijeljina have been negotiated and renegotiated from the perspective of *perceived similarities* among the members of this displaced group of people, as well as from the perspective of *perceived differences* in relation to the other, very similar social group (local population). The study approached these questions 'from below', giving the voice to the displaced persons themselves, thus relying on qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and participant observation

which presupposed continuous and direct interaction with the subjects of the study in their very resettlement sites.

Being the first ethnographic inquiry on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina which put the re-settler community in centre of its interest, and the first comprehensive ethnographic inquiry that addressed BiH displaced people's identification process, this study showed that sense of loss, longing for lost homes, and socio-economic post-displacement troubles have been largely present in lives of Bijeljina IDPs, despite the fact that they voluntarily decided to resettle, instead to return. These feelings and experiences have been considerably stronger among the older population groups. Studying this community more than two decades after the act of forcible displacement showed that feelings of loss and longing for lost home(lands) remain present in private sphere mostly, but that both these factors, as well as the re-settlers' socio-economic struggles, have greatly influenced their self-identification process, thus remaining an important part of their contemporary social and cultural self. The act of buying their own apartments or building their own houses in Bijeljina proved to be one of the most significant events in lives of Bijeljina re-settlers. For these population groups who *did not* wish to return, new houses in their resettlement sites symbolized the establishment of stronger bonds with their new physical and social environment, and the point after which they could get more oriented towards future life projects.

This study also demonstrated that ethnic identities played a major role in Bijeljina IDP's resettlement decision. Bijeljina IDPs' belief that life alongside other ethnic groups is impossible after the experience of war and forcible displacement remains strong until this day, as well as their unwillingness to live in a more unitary and ethnically heterogeneous Bosnia and Herzegovina. While their decision not to return to their pre-war homes goes against sedentarist argument that sees identities as territorially rooted, Bijeljina IDPs' strong connection to the territory of Republika Srpska in post-displacement period signalizes that relationship between ethnicity, place and identity is too complex to be explained either through sedentarist or anti-sedentarist argument only. Bijeljina IDPs' strong feeling of ethnic belonging has not been the sole reason for their resettlement decision. This study argued that displaced persons did not wish to return to their pre-war places of residence because they did not consider them to be their 'homes' anymore, i.e. the pre-war 'homes' could not offer any longer the much-needed feelings of security, familiarity, freedom, and hopefulness.

Therefore, not only that re-settlers in Bijeljina could not be seen as more immune to feelings of loss and nostalgia than some other categories of displaced persons, but they also could not unquestionably be considered as cognizant accomplices in post-war ethnic engineering campaigns. While for many Bijeljina IDPs identification with their respective ethnic group and authority of their respective ethno-national elites have indeed been sufficient reasons for leaving their homes behind for good, there has been a considerable number of those who simply did not wish to return due to a wide range of socio-economic and security concerns. The existence of the latter group also shows that for some forcibly displaced people, displacement does not need to be only about loss, especially about loss of place and loss of well-developed sense of identity. As this study showed in the case of IDPs in Bijeljina, for some people post-displacement life is more about place-making, re-establishing themselves within the new life circumstances, and regaining control over their lives.

While the above findings reveal the way in which ethnic identities influenced Bijeljina IDPs' post-displacement lives – including their resettlement strategies, this study also analysed the reversed process, i.e. how the act of forcible displacement influenced their ethnic identities. The 1992-1995 war and forcible displacement have greatly intensified the sense of ethnic belonging for majority of Bosnians and Herzegovinians, including the main subjects of this study. Nevertheless, the study on Bijeljina showed that the experience of forcible displacement have not radicalized Bijeljina IDPs more than the war has radicalized the local Serb population in Bijeljina. Contrary to some findings in studies on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (see below) which documented the perception of IDPs as more nationalistic, politically and religiously radical, and more antagonistic towards members of other ethnic groups, this study argued that the fact that IDPs in Bijeljina have experienced forcible displacement and the local Serb population have not, does not make their ethnic identification process substantially different, especially regarding their political choices and their attitudes towards the ethnic other.

With regards to the manner in which identities of IDPs in Bijeljina have been negotiated and renegotiated from the perspective of *perceived similarities* among the members of this displaced group of people, this study documented the specific *izbjeglica* [refugee] identity which stems out from a number of (perceived) commonalities among the members of the displaced groups in Bijeljina, such as their very shattering

displacement experience, material and other losses, as well as socio-economic hardship they have undergone since the displacement. These experiences brought closer Bijeljina IDPs and made them different from the local Bijeljina population who has not experienced forcible displacement and could not, as IDPs believe, neither understand nor sympathize with displaced people's predicament and losses. Some elements of *izbjeglica* identity in Bijeljina are also externally imposed by the members of the local Bijeljina population, and they refer to re-settlers presupposed resourcefulness [*snalažljivost*] and capability [*sposobnost*] to successfully handle economic possibilities. Regional identities are also strong within the local Bijeljina society, and they usually matter more in power competition than IDPs' shared *izbjeglica* identity. This means that IDPs who originate from the same town/region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially if they are much more numerous than some other groups of IDPs, hold more power in their hands due to their number and their wide network of social connections. When it comes to the way in which identities of IDPs in Bijeljina have been negotiated and renegotiated from the perspective of *perceived differences* in relation to the local population, this study found out the exceptional importance of urban-rural cleavages on both IDPs' and local Bijeljina population's identification process. The established cultural stereotypes between locals and IDPs in Bijeljina surround the question of who is a bigger *seljak* [peasant], meaning that they primarily originate from their perceived level of urbanity and rurality, which are furthermore tightly linked to the category of social status, and people's perceived level of cultured-ness, sophistication, and education. In this sense, the case of Bijeljina differs from some other studies on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (see below) insofar as the roles of locals and IDPs have been reversed. More concretely, while elsewhere it is the local population that possesses more power within the local society and employs number of cultural stereotypes in relation to the displaced population, in Bijeljina, it is mostly the IDPs, or at least some regional groups among the newcomers to this city, who have attributed negative identity to the local population, and who have managed to promote and make more apparent their presupposed superior distinctiveness in relation to the locals.

Having these identities in mind, this study also demonstrated that people in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina possess a multitude of different identities that, at certain moments in time and under specific social circumstances, can matter more than their

sense of ethnic belonging. This study documented a variety of different identities that exist within one ethnic group and often serve as divisional or contrasted factors, such as being *izbjeglica*, *seljak*, *Semberac* or *Sarajlija*. There are also certain identities within the local Bijeljina society that transcend the widespread ethno-national, or even locals/newcomers divisions, such as *obični ljudi* [ordinary people], as opposed to *ratni profiteri* [war profiteers]. All these are significant social identities that can serve multiple purposes: they connect Bijeljina IDPs with their pre-war selves and offer them feelings of stability and security, they create boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, thus securing existence and persistence of particular social groups, they boost one social group’s positive self-esteem, or they unite people who seemingly have a few things in common, such as members of different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

8.1. The complexity of resettlement vs. return dilemma: On finding a ‘cool ground’ in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina

The resettled communities of internally displaced persons have not been of great interest for the scholarship on war and population displacement in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina for several reasons. One refers to the fact that resettlement decision of these IDPs went against the primary aim of international policymakers involved in the return process to reverse the effects of the wartime ethnic cleansing of population. By deciding to permanently settle in those areas where their co-ethnics constitute majority population, the re-settlers actually cemented the results of the ethnic cleansing campaigns, helping their respective ethno-national elites to consolidate the exclusionist territorial gains which were made during the war. Another reason refers to voluntary character of re-settlers’ decision to remain in their place of refuge and not return to their pre-war homes, in spite of the fact that they were given an opportunity to return just several years upon forcible displacement. As the re-settler communities willingly opted for resettlement over return, addressing some of the difficulties they faced – from material and other losses, their housing and socio-economic problems, as well as the way in which these reflected on their lives and general wellbeing, have been considered

less justified than addressing the difficulties of some other categories of population affected by the war and forcible displacement (e.g. those who wished to return but could not do so for various reasons, minority returnees, etc.). Finally, by deciding to remain in their places of refuge instead of returning to their pre-war homes, the resettlers have surrounded themselves by the members of their respective ethno-national group, and got subjected to the authority of their respective ethno-national political elites. At the time of rampant nationalism when ethno-national identifications became dominant identifying marker in post-war Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, some other categories of population affected by forcible displacement – such as minority returnees, were considered more vulnerable, and therefore were given more attention, both by international and national policymakers and by academic community.

As it was shown throughout this study, and particularly in Chapter 6, internally displaced Serbs who have resettled in Bijeljina strongly identify with their ethnic group, and this identification has influenced their decision not to return to their places of residence which are mostly situated in the Bosniak- and Croat-controlled entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). Some of the main reasons which Bijeljina IDPs mentioned while explaining their resettlement vs. return strategies concerned their strong conviction that life alongside other ethnic groups and their former enemies is not only undesirable, but also practically impossible. “We can live *next to* each other, but never again *with* each other” was a frequently used explanation of how Bijeljina IDPs feel about restoring ethnic heterogeneity throughout the territory of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. In many instances, rather than having roots in Bijeljina IDPs’ personal experiences (e.g. of physical violence and threats), such point of view was based on their ideological convictions, political ideas, or negative stereotypical image of the ethnic other, which, according to my interviewees’ testimonies, emerged during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and only strengthened in the post-war period. For Bijeljina IDPs, favouring ethnically-defined ‘us’ and being ‘on our own (territory)’ and ‘among our own (people)’ is largely taken for granted, and seen as a ‘natural’ way of feeling and expressing their sense of ethnic belonging. Such ‘natural’ feelings and their routine expressions is one of the reasons why Bijeljina IDPs see the ethnic engineering campaigns of their ethno-national leadership (Human Rights Watch 2000; International Crisis Group 2002; Toal and Dahlman 2011) as completely justified actions and as a ‘natural’ response to the experienced armed conflict. Another

reason refers to Bijeljina IDPs' feeling that, when it comes to financial and other support of the international community, the re-settler communities were in disadvantage when compared to some other categories of displaced persons, such as minority returnees. Seeing the international, large-scale humanitarian organisations as incapable of recognizing needs and desires of all refugees and IDPs –especially those who did not wish to return– the support of Bijeljina IDPs' respective political leadership on the local level was welcomed as a necessary and a just measure. However, although in a sense 'replacing' or 'complementing' the international assistance to the displaced population, the actions of the local ethno-national elites could not be considered as a form of "vernacular humanitarianism" (Brković 2017b; Thiemann 2018) documented, among other, in the local Bijeljina society too (Brković 2017a). It is because the aid Bijeljina IDPs received at the local level was more a part of the systematic and planned ethnic engineering campaign, than it was a matter of compassion and voluntary intervention where other institutions and organisations failed to intervene. Finally, alongside this view, the role of ethnic engineering campaigns in their resettlement process is usually downplayed by Bijeljina IDPs because they are either dissatisfied with the nature or amount of help they have received from their ethno-national elites, or, more importantly, because the acknowledgement of this help or even of pressure to resettle, would portray other reasons for resettlement as less important, and deny Bijeljina IDPs' agency in one of the most significant decisions in their lives.

Bijeljina IDPs believed that too much blood was spilled, and too many different losses were experienced during the armed conflict to be easily forgotten and left in the past. My interlocutors often stressed that they have been taught many historical lessons concerning life in a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina as a non-success story (particularly the Second World War and the recent 1992-1995 war), and that they do not intend to make the same mistake in the future. In this way, by remaining separated from Bosnian Muslims and Croats, they are preventing their children from going through similar war experiences. Furthermore, being the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. being of Christian Orthodox religion, speaking Serbian language, and being able to control their own territory and institutions, means a lot to Bijeljina IDPs. In this context, they believe that their basic rights and freedoms –including the right to publicly express such defined ethnic identity– would be suppressed under the Bosniak

and Croat rule, because they would be subjected to the former enemies' political, socio-economic, and cultural dominance. The same conviction was the main reason behind the decision of nearly 100,000 Serbs from the region of Sarajevo to leave their homes in February 1996, several months after the war was formally over. As it was presented in Chapter 5, for this category of displaced Serbs in Bijeljina, their very sense of self in the context of their post-displacement lives, is largely connected to the narratives of the 1996 exodus and the sacrifice Sarajevan Serbs have made for the 'greater national good', epitomized in consolidating the ideal of having the Serb-dominated territory within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given these sacrifices and experienced losses, for Bijeljinar IDPs from Sarajevo, but also from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serb-dominated entity of Republika Srpska (RS) has replaced their pre-war 'homes' both as a geographical space they feel connected to, and as an idea they feel protective of. While Bijeljinar IDPs' decision not to return goes against the sedentarist view which sees people as forever rooted in specific territory and in search of restoring this 'natural order' once it is (violently) disturbed, the importance of resettling on the specific territory of Republika Srpska shows that Bijeljinar IDPs' practices of identification in post-displacement period have still been negotiated in relation to certain territory. Similarly to the argument of Jansen and Löfving (2009) (see also Markowitz and Stefansson 2004), the case of Bijeljinar IDPs demonstrates that in each empirical case there is a complex array of identity negotiation and re-negotiation that could or could not be related to particular territory. Hence, the link between identity and territory cannot be neither simply presumed nor categorically denied.

In relation to the importance of the specific territory for Bijeljinar IDPs, their decision to resettle in Republika Srpska has also been affected by international policymaking, primarily by the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), discussed in more details in Chapter 3. By dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into largely ethnically homogenous entities, and proclaiming an ethnic principle in internal organisation and functioning of the country, the DPA additionally confirmed Bijeljinar IDPs' fears of a common life with their former enemies, and solidified their decision to resettle in their place of refuge. As mentioned above, IDPs in Bijeljina feared that their rights and freedoms could not be guaranteed and respected at the territory dominated and controlled by other ethnic groups, and they took the opportunity given by the provisions of the DPA to live on the entity dominated and controlled by their own ethnic

group (Republika Srpska), where they would be surrounded by the people with whom they share the common language, religion and culture.

It would be an overstatement to assume that Bijeljina IDPs would return to their pre-war homes in FBiH if the DPA did not divide the country along ethnic lines. Given the increased significance of ethnic identifications during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the way in which my interlocutors in Bijeljina in particular talked about *their* ethnic identity, it is highly possible that Bijeljina IDPs would opt for resettlement over return, regardless of the territorial organization of the country. However, it is also important to note that regarding their early displacement period, an overwhelming majority of my interlocutors in Bijeljina talked about their strong hope that their displacement was only temporary, and their honest conviction that they would return to their pre-war homes as soon as the conflict was over. Such conviction could be attributed to their initial state of shock and rejection to accept the fact that, from that moment on, their lives were going to radically change. Nevertheless, Bijeljina IDPs also stressed that the provisions of the DPA at least added an extra argument in favour of resettlement, as the return would not only imply the life alongside their former enemies, but also the subjection to their political, socio-economic, and cultural norms and values. Their fear was justified at the time when they needed to make a decision whether to return, as the memories of ethnically-motivated discrimination and maltreatment by their former co-citizens in their pre-war places of residence were still fresh, while their pre-war houses and other properties were mostly demolished or completely destroyed. Peter Loizos (2008; 2009) observed that Argaki villagers decided not to return to their homes because the Annan Plan, put to the people of Cyprus in a 2004 referendum, was simply 'too little' and it came 'too late' for these refugees. Similarly, it could be said that for Bijeljina IDPs the possibility of return to their pre-war homes was also 'too little' in comparison to what the lives surrounded by their co-ethnic in the Republika Srpska could offer, but it also came 'too early' after their shattering war and displacement experiences, as it was not able to mitigate their basic security and socio-economic concerns.

All this being said, this study has confirmed the role of ethnic identifications in Bosnian and Herzegovinian internally displaced persons' resettlement decisions. In other words, for the re-settler community in Bijeljina, their sense of ethno-national belonging, primarily expressed through their strong identification with the elements of

the Serb national being (such as Serbian language and Christian Orthodox religion) and the Serb-controlled territory (Republika Srpska), has played an important role in their decision not to return to their pre-war places of residence. However, this study also gave evidence of the complexity of resettlement vs. return dilemma, which could not be reduced to internally displaced persons' ethnic identifications only, neither explained exclusively through their loyalty towards the respective ethno-nationalist leaderships, or their deep considerations about their ethno-religious background. More concretely, the study argued that Bijeljina IDPs' decision not to return also had to do with the very characteristics of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the specific, personal kind of violence between erstwhile neighbours and friends and within well-known physical places and settings (Bougarel 2004; Sorabji 1995), transformed the meaning of 'home' for the displaced population, and frightened them into never wishing to return. My interlocutors felt that due to the violence experienced during the 1992-1995 war and traumas caused by the forcible displacement, the places which were left behind could not be considered 'homes' anymore, as they were not capable of offering the much-needed feelings of security, familiarity, and freedom.

It was also argued in Chapter 6 that pre-war homes could not any longer provide 'normal life' (Jansen 2006, 2007, 2016; Jansen and Löfving 2009) for Bijeljina IDPs, meaning that they could not offer the necessary feeling of safety and decent living standard, but neither the *hope* that their lives could move forward in accordance to their needs and aspirations at that specific moment in time. Hence, pre-war homes became the places of the *past*, but also the places which deprive displaced population of the *future* they imagined for themselves. Moreover, not only that the war has physically transformed their pre-war towns and villages, but it has also, together with the experienced material and other losses, changed Bijeljina IDPs themselves, and, very importantly, it has changed social relationships and a specific kind of bond that existed between pre-war neighbours and friends. As 'home' could be defined as "a living organism of relationships and traditions stretching back into the past" (Zetter 1998: 310), without Bijeljina IDPs' social world and social networks which existed prior to the war, the homely feeling could not be restored either. "We have nobody to drink coffee with", my interlocutors melancholically complained, explaining that without this very social closeness they felt prior to the war, they could not renew close bonds with their pre-war towns and villages either, because, after all, "buildings do not make a city,

people do" (Chapter 5). Having this in mind, Bijeljina IDPs' decision to live surrounded by their co-ethnic and on the territory dominated by their respective ethnic group, could not only be read through their strong sense of ethnic belonging, but also through their need to feel safe, free, and hopeful. According to Bijeljina IDPs, these qualities could only be accomplished if they were not subjected to the rule of the former enemy groups, even if it meant not returning to the places they used to call 'homes'. Therefore, the influence of the provisions of the DPA on Bijeljina IDPs' resettlement decision could also be read as offering them the possibility to *feel at home* again, after the places they called homes up to that point, lost all those qualities that could define them as such.

Given these feelings, IDPs in Bijeljina seemed to have been less preoccupied with return to their former homes at any cost, than with finding a secure and stable place, a sort of 'cool ground' (Allen 1996; Allen and Turton 1996; Turton 1988), where they could leave their shattering war and forcible displacement experiences in the past, and get oriented towards the future life projects. More than any other event in their post-displacement lives, the moment at which Bijeljina IDPs entered their newly-bought apartments or newly-built houses symbolized the moment at which their bonds with the pre-war homes weakened, while their ties with the post-war places of residence strengthened and deepened. From that moment on, Bijeljina IDPs were finally able to move on with their lives, focusing on what is yet to be accomplished, instead of mourning for what has been inevitably lost. Importantly, as a symbol of social worth, moral unity, and commitment to the family (Bringa 1995) the newly-built houses helped Bijeljina IDPs in regaining certain aspects of their self-identity which they felt to be abruptly and unwillingly taken from them due to the war and forcible displacement. As presented in Chapter 5, the importance of the act of entering their newly-built houses and symbolism this act carried, shows that post-displacement struggles and predicament of Bijeljina IDPs have not been less real and their losses less painful because they willingly opted for resettlement over return. The decision to resettle at the territory of Bijeljina municipality was their own, but they needed more than a decade of humiliation, uncertainty and hard work to start feeling 'on their own'.

Hence, even though the resettlement decision was extremely difficult for many, and in spite of the occasional nostalgia felt for their former homes and homelands (regions, towns and villages of origin), this study corroborated the hypothesis (Black

2002; Čapo 2015; Jansen 2006, 2007; Jansen and Löfving 2009; Korac 2009; Malkki 1992, 1995; Stefansson 2004, 2006; Žíla 2015) that for some displaced persons, the cure for experienced traumas, losses, and sudden disorder in their lives, does not necessarily lie in renewed territorialized belonging, i.e. in a physical return to their pre-war homes per se. Instead, this study pointed out that for the particular group(s) of displaced persons in Bijeljina, forcible displacement has not only been about the loss of place and loss of selves, but also about a fresh start, place-making, and regaining control over their lives under the new life circumstances.

8.2. Recognizing similarities, identifying the self: On being an *izbjeglica* in Bijeljina

After the resettlement, Bijeljina IDPs' forcible displacement experience has continued to shape this population's understanding of self and other. As it was discussed in Chapter 5, the label *izbjeglica* has been externally created, primarily by Bijeljina's local population, but almost equally, through everyday practices and habitual discourses, by the media and political and other authorities. Today it is widely accepted and used not only by the locals, but by the displaced group(s) of people in Bijeljina as well. Unlike Greek refugees from Asia Minor who take pride in their refugee descent (Voutira 2003), only few of my interlocutors stated that they were happy to be called *izbjeglice*. On the other side, majority of them were indifferent towards this label, while there was also a considerable number of Bijeljina IDPs who see this label in negative light. For the latter category of Bijeljina IDPs, the label *izbjeglica* is associated with their traumatic displacement experience, and humiliating socio-economic conditions they lived in upon forcible displacement. In addition, these Bijeljina IDPs see the label *izbjeglica* in negative light due to perceived poor treatment and lack of understanding by the local population, as well as due to a failure of the political elites to promote this label –and the category of population it refers to– more positively in public discourse. Thus, the label *izbjeglica* has been rejected by many Bijeljina IDPs because it represents a reminder that there has been an undesired and unpleasant disruption in their lives which, for a long period of time, has distanced them from their pre-war social status and

self-understanding associated with it. Today, the success with which many Bijeljina IDPs moved on with their lives, and certain social position they (re)established for themselves and their families, make them feel detached from the label *izbjeglica* which used to arouse all those negative feelings mentioned above.

Over the years the *izbjeglica* social category has transformed into distinguished social identity on the ground, stemming, among other, from the *perceived similarities* among the members of the displaced groups(s) of people. Unlike the label *izbjeglica* which has been externally imposed, the *izbjeglica* identity is mostly the result of Bijeljina IDPs' self-identification process that affirms IDPs' agency and stresses those positive features and values associated with this particular group(s) of people. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 19) define collective identity as "emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group" which involves "felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members". In Chapter 5 this study argued that 1) the very experience of forcible displacement, 2) the post-war struggle for socio-economic survival caused by this displacement, as well as 3) the strong feelings of loss of certain components of their pre-war lives and aspects of their pre-war selves, represent those common experiences which are, to a lesser or greater extent, shared by all Bijeljina IDPs. They are, therefore, those "qualities of sameness" (Barnard and Spencer 2005) or 'things that bind' (Chapter 5) Bijeljina IDPs, and generate a sense of belonging to a specific social group. As such similarities represent social constructs that exist symbolically in the lives of group members (Cohen 2001), this bond is not based on some 'objective' assessment, but is a matter of *feeling to be similar* to those who share those important experiences, or at least more similar than to some other social groups (e.g. locals in Bijeljina), who have never learnt what it means to be forcibly displaced.

In the context of perceived similarities among Bijeljina IDPs, this study argued that a sense of belonging to the specific social group has first and foremost been created through Bijeljina IDPs' mutual feelings of compassion for each other's suffering during the period of post-displacement socio-economic deprivation, as well as through their common feelings of loss. The 'qualities of sameness' among Bijeljina IDPs have become evident due to the impression that their struggles could only be properly understood by those who have gone through the similar displacement experience, meaning that the local population has not been able to relate to their pain and predicament as much as their fellow IDPs have. In this sense, "it takes a refugee to understand one" in words of

displaced Argaki villagers in Cyprus (Loizos 1981: 127, 183), or “we can tell each other at a distance [...] [t]his pain is a single pain felt by everyone” in words of Russian migrants in the Russian Federation (Pilkington 1998: 167), translates into “you cannot even begin to describe it to someone who hasn’t experienced it” (Chapter 5) in words of the displaced group(s) of people in the Bosnian town of Bijeljina.

Moreover, the sense of the common *izbjeglica* identity among Bijeljinan IDPs has also been created due to the solidarity that members of this population group expressed in their mutual efforts to overcome all the difficulties in their lives triggered by the act of forcible displacement. Bijeljinan IDPs, both men and women, have been oriented towards each other already from the early period of displacement, when they shared the same neighbourhoods, schools, and temporarily occupied Bosniak households, and very often participated in the same economic activities which differed from those in which the local population was predominantly engaged. Later on, many relatives and pre-war neighbours and friends bought a plot of land and built their houses in the same ‘refugee settlements’ [*izbjeglička naselja*], thus strengthening the social ties which were formed in the pre-war period of their lives, or during the initial period of their displacement in Bijeljina. For IDPs in Bijeljina, choosing to surround themselves with their relatives and pre-war neighbours and friends, relying on their material and emotional support and reciprocal free labour, also meant securing their survival both in economic and social sense. The compassion between displaced persons and solidarity they feel for one another, are the most frequently mentioned qualities which Bijeljinan IDPs associate with the *izbjeglica* identity. As individuals strive to enhance their self-esteem and within it achieve or maintain positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1986), these particular characteristics have been singled out as important commonalities between Bijeljinan IDPs because they are seen as positive features, something that creates positive group distinctiveness in relation to other groups. Additionally, this specific bond between Bijeljinan IDPs has given them the reputation of strongly united and well-connected population groups within the local Bijeljinan society. As identification is also something that is realized and negotiated through interaction with others and is a matter of relationship between internal self-definition and external ascription (Jenkins (2008 [1996])), this aspect of the *izbjeglica* identity has to a large extent been externally ascribed, primarily by the local population in Bijeljina. The locals in Bijeljina believe that IDPs tend to stick together [*držati se zajedno*] way

more than the locals do, primarily due to IDPs' shared displacement experience, but also due to their perceived resourcefulness [*snalažljivost*] and capability [*sposobnost*] visible in their supposedly very successful handling of economic possibilities.

This study also pointed out that an *izbjeglica* identity from the perspective of perceived similarities among the members of the displaced group(s) of people in Bijeljina has been losing on its relevance with the passage of time. The losses caused by the shattering displacement experience and the hardship many Bijeljinan IDPs have undergone since, are those experiences my interlocutors talked about when encouraged to do so, while in everyday interaction and informal conversations, these issues have been mentioned only exceptionally. Their characteristic solidarity has been losing its prominent social role more than two decades after the forcible displacement, when majority of Bijeljinan IDPs have managed to significantly improve their living standard and stand on their own two feet. Also, the bonds created out of this solidarity have become an integral, but mainly an invisible part, of their everyday lives. Moreover, the feeling of loss among Bijeljinan IDPs have remained present quietly, like an "iron in their souls" (Loizos 2008), and it continues to exist mostly in the private sphere, suppressed by displaced persons' apparent pride for being able to successfully move on with their lives. As mentioned earlier, many of my interlocutors even despised the label *izbjeglica*, as they considered themselves to be in a state where all the connotations this label invokes are not part of their self-understanding anymore. Although all this does not negate the fact that the factors such as common feeling of loss or mutual compassion and solidarity, have indeed influenced Bijeljinan IDPs' collective understanding of who they are, it is also offering the evidence of the situational and contextual character of social identifications (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). More concretely, in the context of the local Bijeljinan setting and due to the presence of other social groups, some other social identities –or certain elements of these social identities– become more important and more relevant under different social circumstances and with the inevitable passage of time.

One such example are regional identities which, in addition to the common forcible displacement experience, provide another 'quality of sameness' for Bijeljinan IDPs, discernable in their shared geographical origins which imply their perceived cultural similarities, as well. Coming from diverse regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina enumerated in Chapter 4, both older and younger generations of Bijeljinan IDPs tend to

strongly identify with their pre-war places of residence, stressing how feelings of compassion, solidarity, and unity have been even stronger, while social interaction has been even deeper, among those IDPs who share the same pre-war origins. Rather than being designated as *izbjeglice* in the sense described above, in majority of social situations Bijeljina IDPs would define themselves as *Sarajlije*, *Tuzlaci*, *Zeničani*, *Krajišnici*, *Ozrenici* and similar. Although these regional identities existed before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they have been renegotiated in the context of the post-war local society of Bijeljina, where members of all these groups needed to share the same social space, while very often having clashing interests and demands.

As discussed in Chapter 5, different associations of displaced persons which were founded in the last decade in Bijeljina, have played a particularly important role in promoting and strengthening such defined regional identities. The main objectives of each of Bijeljina's major associations of displaced persons have been defined in order to satisfy the needs of the regionally determined groups of IDPs (IDPs from Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Bosanska Krajina), in whose name these associations have been speaking and acting. The most significant activities of these associations concern revalorization of the region-specific culture through organizing different cultural and socializing events, as well as fostering the region-specific memories of the war and forcible displacement through different commemorative anniversaries and rituals. In this way, displaced groups of people from different regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have each been reinforcing their own sense of similarity based on a common history and culture, which has encouraged the preservation of the distinct regional identities within the local Bijeljina society. Unlike the *izbjeglica* identity which is sometimes associated with IDPs' misfortune and socio-economic deprivation, these regional identities carry more positive connotations, as they either stress the displaced persons' distinguished pre-war cultural characteristics (through revalorized cultural heritage), or their wartime victories and post-war accomplishments (through selected historical narratives and commemorative events), both of which stress their presumed uniqueness vis-à-vis other (regional) groups. Importantly, through such memories and narratives of the past, displaced persons got the opportunity to regain the sense of continuity with their past lives, alongside which their identities could be reconstructed, and their feelings of belonging restored.

The specific role that memory of the past and IDPs associations as mediators of this memory play upon forcible displacement, has also been stressed in the studies of the Asia Minor refugees in Greece (Alpan 2012; Clark 2006; Hirschon 1998 [1989], 2004; Koufopoulou 2003). However, unlike these refugees (Hirschon 2014; Stelaku 2003), Bijeljina IDPs have *not* attempted to replicate their religious and cultural heritage in the resettlement sites, and the names of these sites do not recall these IDPs' pre-war localities because they feared that this could be understood as their intention to get secluded from the rest of Semberija's population. The explanation could also lie in the fact that Bijeljina IDPs felt more culturally closer to the local population in Bijeljina, than Asia Minor Greeks to their co-ethnics in Greece, thus not being in need to hold onto the specific material manifestations of their cultural heritage within the new physical environment. Additionally, the voluntary character of Bijeljina IDPs' resettlement and the possibility to freely visit their pre-war locations, made them feel less dependent on the specific cultural and religious heritage in their self-identification process upon displacement, than it was the case with Asia Minor Greeks whose displacement was finite, and the return out of question. Finally, both these displacement occurred in different political and social circumstances, whereby Asia Minor Greeks in many instances built their settlements from scratch in largely depopulated areas of Greece, while Bijeljina IDPs got resettled within or in an immediate proximity of the existing, densely populated Semberija's settlements with well-developed institutions and infrastructure.

8.3. Constructing differences, identifying the self: On (not) being a *seljak* in Bijeljina

Except for defining who we believe we are like, identification process also implies defining who we are unlike. In other words, we do not merely associate ourselves with a set of characteristics that define a social group we believe we belong to – we, at the same time, dissociate ourselves from others. Without the process of looking for features that differentiate our group from other groups, we cannot become conscious of our identity either – “without the other, I cannot be myself; without the others, we cannot

be us” (Eriksen 2004: 159). Thus, existence and persistence of a particular group is dependent upon existence of other groups and upon maintenance of social boundaries between them. In fact, social identity *is* a product of the process of boundary formation between ourselves and others (Barth 1969). As “difference is asserted against what is closest” (Bourdieu 1984: 479), in Chapter 7 this study looked into the relationship or between Bijeljina IDPs and the local Bijeljina population, or, more concretely, into ‘things that divide’ these two groups who share a number of common features, such as the common language, religion and ethnicity.

While this study stressed that the *izbjeglica* identity based on perceived similarities among the displaced group(s) of people have been losing its significance with the passage of time, the *izbjeglica* identity which stems out from the perceived differences in relation to the local Bijeljina population (as well as in relation to different regionally-defined displaced groups of people), has become one of the most significant aspects of Bijeljina IDPs’ understanding of themselves in this particular local society, and the local society in relation to themselves. As it was presented in Chapter 7, the relationship between locals and newcomers, i.e. the relationship between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, has largely shaped these groups’ understandings of selves and others, primarily through their competition over principal sources of power available in this particular local society, and especially through their perceived cultural differences concerning the level of each other’s urbanity (cultured-ness) and rurality (uncultured-ness). With regards to the former, competition between the locals and the newcomers became most visible after Bijeljina IDPs permanently settled in Bijeljina, which marked the point after which they started progressing economically, thus representing threat to the established power relations in the local Bijeljina society. In contemporary Bijeljina, the power is primarily derived from the monopoly over key positions in local institutions and political parties, as well as from greater cohesion and solidarity which empowers people to create and utilize different social connections for their own benefit. Bijeljina *izbjeglice* see themselves as underprivileged population group whose voice has been prevented from being heard, and whose overall progress has been frustrated due to the local population’s dominance in the local institutions. On the other side, the local population believes that Bijeljina IDPs have been holding the monopoly over business sector and professional services, and that their wealth, influence, and tendency to stick together, enables them to practically rule from the shadows. However, as this

study argued, both of these groups tend to understate their place in the local Bijeljina political and social hierarchy, basing their claims on what they perceive this place to be, rather than what it actually is. In other words, the social boundaries which are in this way created between IDPs and locals in Bijeljina exist “in the minds of their beholders” (Cohen 2001: 12), but this, however, does not make them less real.

In parallel with their perceived inferiority in power relations within the local Bijeljina society, Bijeljina IDPs hold a stance that they are *culturally superior* in relation to the local population, which largely reflects on their perceived moral superiority, as well. While IDPs’ feelings of loss and memories of the shattering displacement experience are to some extent hidden under thick layers of everyday life, or are mitigated due to the inevitable passage of time, their self-understanding which stems from the perceived degree of their own progressivity and cultured-ness (as well as backwardness and uncultured-ness of others) remains very much apparent throughout the wider social space in Bijeljina. This cultural superiority is primarily linked to Bijeljina IDPs’ urban origins, which are claimed to be possessed regardless of their specific pre-war lifestyles, or the size and degree of socio-economic and cultural development of their pre-war places of residence. In other words, Bijeljina IDPs of both urban and rural origin consider themselves to be culturally more advanced compared to the local population in Semberija. On the other side, both urban and rural locals see all displaced persons in their region from the same superior position, stressing that even those who indeed came from more urban places than Bijeljina, are either lying about their origins, or are not those ‘true’ or ‘proper’ representatives of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian urbanites, as they try to present themselves.

This shows that, unlike the newcomers from Elias’ and Scotson’s study (1994 [1965]) on Winston Parva who accepted the lower status allotted to them by the established groups, Bijeljina IDPs have rejected the role of ‘outsiders’ within the local Bijeljina society that was initially ascribed to them by the old or ‘established’ population in this city. Although, as mentioned above, this process works in both directions, it is mostly the newcomers in Bijeljina who have attributed negative identity to the local population, and who have managed to promote and make more apparent their presupposed superior distinctiveness in relation to the latter group. Similar findings were obtained by Hirschon (1998 [1989]) regarding the Asia Minor refugees in Athenian suburb of Kokkinia, or Čapo-Žmegač (2007) in her study on Srijem Croats

from Serbian province of Vojvodina settling in the village of Gradina in Croatia. Srijem Croats also considered themselves to be culturally superior to their Croat hosts in Gradina, mostly due to a well-developed sense of their own identity, as felt and articulated in their pre-displacement social setting. However, while Srijem Croats in Gradina are relatively small and compact community, Bijeljina IDPs are much more numerous and they originate from diverse regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina with strongly developed, and sometimes strongly opposing, regional identities discussed in Chapter 5. Consequently, the superior stance in relation to the local Bijeljina population has not been taken by all Bijeljina IDPs equally. As described in Chapter 7, the IDPs originating from industrial regions and large urban centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina tend to be more inclined to perceive their co-ethnics in Bijeljina as socially, culturally, and morally inferior. Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) also argue that a social group with more power within a particular local society can use its monopoly over different power channels to exclude and stigmatise members of another, very similar group, but when the uneven balance of power created upon newcomers' arrival to a particular society diminishes, 'the outsiders' (i.e. the newcomers) tend to retaliate and they resort to counter-stigmatisation. Following this argument, it seems that at least some regionally-defined groups of newcomers in Bijeljina have managed to overpower 'the established' groups in Bijeljina, mainly due to their financial superiority and wide network of social connections in Bijeljina and beyond.

Therefore, unlike other studies who tackled the issue of the relationship between locals and newcomers in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. Kolind 2008; Maček 2009; Pickering 2007; Stefansson 2004a, 2004b, 2006), this study pointed out that within the local Bijeljina society, the negative perception of the newcomers does not exist exclusively because of these newcomers' actual rural background. Instead, rurality of *some* groups of these newcomers has been attributed to the entire community of IDPs in this city, and in this way used to maximize distinctiveness between *Semberci* and *izbjeglice*, and, in turn, minimize the perception of differences among *Semberci* themselves. In this way, as social psychology theories point out (Hogg and Abrams 1998; Tajfel and Turner 1986), members of the nominally 'same' social group are strengthening their sense of a common social identity. Such generalizations and attribution of negative stereotypes is even more apparent among Bijeljina IDPs, whose superior stance in relation to both rural and urban locals represents the most obvious

aspect of their self-identification process. Through ascription of negative stereotypes to the entire community of local population in Bijeljina, the newcomers to this city have been enhancing their self-esteem and maintaining their positive social identity within the new physical and social environment. Hence, although confirming the importance of urban/rural cleavages in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (see e.g. Jansen 2005; Pickering 2007; Stefansson 2004a; 2007), this study also pointed out that the relationship between locals and newcomers could not simply be explained through the rivalry between urban and rural lifestyle, but it needs to be seen through the specific *meanings* both these categories of population attach to urbanity and rurality of themselves and others, and what roles such meanings play in their identification process. As being 'urban' is seen as a highly positive quality equally by the locals and the IDPs in Bijeljina, both of these two groups tend to identify themselves as such, either by explicitly stressing this presumed quality of theirs, or by attaching the opposite ('rural') qualities to the other group. Rather than having the capacity to create deep social divisions within the local Bijeljinan society, this process serves the purpose to define the boundaries of one's own group, whereby this group is presented to be superior in relation to the other. Thus, one social group's perceived level of urbanity (culturedness), compared to the other social group's perceived level of rurality (unculturedness), has been used to create and maintain the efficient boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. The formation and maintenance of such boundaries secures the existence and persistence of these two social groups in Bijeljina.

In attempting to explain why is it that the perceived level of one's urbanity or rurality represents such an important element of identification process of both locals and newcomers in Bijeljina, this study argued that within the local society of Bijeljina, there exists a convergence between the categories of social status and urban-rural origin. The stereotypical portrayal of a person or a group of people who originate from urban, as opposed to rural areas, corresponds to the stereotypical images of highlander, as opposed to lowlander population, whereby the latter one has been associated with agricultural work and peasant, i.e. backward and traditional way of life. Given the fact that Bijeljina is situated in an agricultural region, while most places where newcomers to this city originate from are not, Bijeljinan IDPs stressed that the local population's engagement in agriculture represents the most significant difference that separates 'us' from 'them'. In this view, being an agriculturalist or *seljak* [peasant] means being

primitive, uncultured, uneducated and unsophisticated, which, as Chapter 7 presented, has been visible in all spheres of social life – starting from local people’s general lifestyle, to the way in which they organize their households, regulate their family and neighbourly relations, and practice their religious and other customs. On the other side, Bijeljina IDPs are very vocal in stressing their own urbanity, cultured-ness and sophistication, which is, in majority of cases, primarily associated with their higher educational level in comparison to Semberija’s peasantry.

Both the contempt towards agriculture as an occupation and a way of life, and the perception of (higher) education as the most important, if not the only precondition, for people’s cultured-ness and overall sophistication, have their roots in the modernist project which promoted modernization and urbanization processes at the expense of the traditional rural cultural patterns and peasant lifestyle. Within the official ideology of the socialist Yugoslav state, many Bijeljina IDPs belonged to those categories of Yugoslavs who, unlike the Yugoslav peasantry, ‘made it’ to the cities and got ‘urbanized’, which was accomplished through becoming a part of the privileged working class (skilled and unskilled workers) or urban middle-class (civil servants and intellectuals). Becoming educated and becoming urbanized were some of the most desirable achievements in the socialist Yugoslavia, and many Yugoslavs, including some groups of Bijeljina IDPs, have spent considerable time and invested considerable efforts to attain particular social status and social prestige which stemmed from it. Such achieved social status and particular lifestyle attached to it, defined these groups of people, constituting the key aspect of their self-identification process. Bijeljina IDPs’ preoccupation with stressing their urbanity and cultural superiority –either openly or through pointing to the rurality of others– represents their attempt to reconstruct their identity in the new social surrounding and within this surrounding’s new, unfamiliar norms and values. Through reconstructing this particular image they hold of themselves, Bijeljina IDPs are overcoming their forcible displacement traumas and losses – especially the loss of their social status and dignity, and achieving a sense of continuity with their violently disturbed pre-displacement lives.

Apart from the urban working and middle-classes, a large majority of Bijeljina IDPs belonged to the category of peasant-workers, who, although remaining to live in the countryside, kept in touch with urban norms and values through their employment in the city’s industrial sector. By living in the village and being partially engaged in

agriculture, the category of peasant-workers represented the closest social group to the peasantry in the countryside, occupying the very bottom of the social ladder as the poorest segment of the Yugoslav society. However, their partial involvement in industrial work which requested particular skills and/or type of education, and their everyday contact with the urban lifestyle, made them feel more advanced and more cultured than their fellow co-villagers. Bijeljina IDPs who prior to the war and forcible displacement belonged to the category of peasant-workers, were those who emphasized the most their perceived superiority in relation to the local Bijeljina population, looking for the signs of their more advanced cultural stage in variety of 'minor differences' among the two groups. This confirms a theoretical assumption (Blok 1998; Brewer 2001) that one group's social identity gets negotiated based on perceived differences in relation to other groups, whereby the more similar these groups are in their values and aspirations, the more severe is the intergroup social competition, and the greater the need to emphasize the smallest differences between them. In the context of the local Bijeljina society, IDPs who could be associated with peasant-worker category in the socialist Yugoslavia, believe that their partial involvement in industry and touch with urban lifestyle secures their superior position in relation to the local population, making in this way effective boundaries between the two groups of people in Bijeljina: the urban, advanced, and cultured 'people of industry', and the rural, backward, and uncultured 'cabbage people' [*kupusari*].

8.4. When some identities matter more: On challenging the salience of ethnic identifications in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina

Through the analysis of the local Bijeljina society, this study offered an additional argument in favour of the thesis (see e.g. Jansen 2005; Pickering 2007; Stefansson 2004a; 2007) that the category of urban-rural origin, which largely overlaps with the category of class, has a capacity to shape social relations in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, in spite of an apparent dominance of ethno-national categories. This study demonstrated that the nominally 'same' ethnic identity of the locals and the newcomers did not prevent either of these two groups from treating each other as strangers or as a

threat to their position in the local society, as it did not prevent them from developing a number of stereotypes which aimed at presenting the other group as socially, culturally, and morally inferior. Thus, similarly to some other studies on the relationship between co-ethnic locals and newcomers presented in Chapter 2 (Brun 2003; Čapo-Žmegač 2007; Clark 2006; Dragojević 2010; Duijzings 1995; Dunkan 2005; Hirschon 1998 [1989], 2006; Köker 2003; Koufopoulou 2003; Pilkington 1998; Stelaku 2003), the case of the local Bijeljina society pointed out that the shared ethnic identity of the displaced persons (*izbjeglice*) and their hosts (*Semberci*) does not represent a sufficient factor for assuring the newcomers' quick and smooth incorporation into their new physical and social environment, in spite of the importance of ethnic identification in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While shared ethnicity could not secure an easy integration of the newcomers into their new physical and social environment, some other factors, such as age, education, and their spatial distribution, have had a larger impact on Bijeljina IDPs' integration process. Age has influenced Bijeljina IDPs' integration process in a way that older generations struggled more to move on with their lives, both in a sense of cutting ties with their pre-war homes and homelands, and in a sense of establishing close social relationship with the members of the local population. In the context of the local Bijeljina society, the older generations of IDPs presuppose those persons who, in their words, "were formed as individuals" at the time of displacement, or, more concretely, who had an established networks of friends and acquaintances, who were employed for some time and had professional careers, and/or those who were married and had their own families created when the war broke out. Spatial seclusion of 'refugee neighbourhoods' within Bijeljina's rural areas has also played a role in a slower integration of the older and less educated generations of Bijeljina IDPs, who neither personally nor professionally felt in need of searching for new social contacts outside their close circle of neighbours and friends. On the other side, the IDPs in Bijeljina's urban area, those who quickly found employment and spread their social networks (especially highly educated professionals), as well as those who were only children at the time of displacement, have integrated more smoothly into the new social surrounding. Although in majority of cases they consider themselves to be *izbjeglice* and/or they identify with their respective pre-war regions, the younger generations of Bijeljina IDPs do not have a sense of loss as developed as in the case of their parents

and grandparents, they have weak or no ties with their pre-war places of residence, and they tend not to frequently employ stereotypical view of the local population, or they use it mostly in a humorous manner. Intermarriages between younger generations of *izbjeglice* and *Semberci* have also become a common occurrence in Semberija, which offers an additional proof of younger generations' less challenging integration paths. Gender seems to have not played a significant role in Bijeljina IDPs' integration process. In other words, in rural areas with segregated 'refugee neighbourhoods', IDPs have integrated slower, and in urban areas way faster and without serious obstacles, regardless of their gender. Also, both men and women who belong to younger generations of Bijeljina IDPs have had relatively smooth integration into the local Bijeljina society.

Furthermore, through looking into identity and forcible displacement in the north-eastern Bosnian town of Bijeljina, it was stressed earlier that Bijeljina IDPs have a strong sense of their ethnic identity, which has been one of the most decisive factors in their post-displacement resettlement decisions. Ethnicity matters to Bijeljina IDPs within a broader context of the post-war society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in relation to the country's other (non-Serb, non-Orthodox) ethno-religious groups. However, when put in the context of the local Bijeljina society, ethnic identification of Bijeljina IDPs becomes a part of a wider sense of ethno-national belonging shared by all Serbs in this society, regardless of the duration of their stay in Bijeljina. Hence, having in mind the situational and contextual character of social identities (Eriksen 2004; Jenkins 2008 [1996]), ethnicity of Bijeljina IDPs does not seem to be the most prominent aspect of their identification process when this issue is observed and discussed on micro-level, within the particular local society of Bijeljina. In other words, when Bijeljina IDPs define who they are (and who they are not) within their post-displacement resettlement site, the real and perceived socio-cultural differences between them and the local Bijeljina population push aside their ethno-national commonality. Except for the categories of urban-rural origin and social status, some other categories which transcend the widespread ethno-national, or even locals/newcomers divisions –such as 'war profiteers', as opposed to 'ordinary people' thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7– represent an important aspect of Bijeljina population's identification process, and an important source of non-ethnic cleavages within this specific local setting. The cleavage between 'war profiteers' and 'ordinary

people' is particularly strong, and, unlike the cleavage between 'people of industry' and 'cabbage people', is having a far more reaching effect on creating and maintaining social inequalities within the local Bijeljina society. Although these identities do not lead Bijeljina Serbs –both locals and IDPs– to question their strong ethnic identifications or challenge their own national stereotypes and preconceptions, it is important to note that, similarly to the case of the Croatian refugees among their co-ethnics in Gradina, in Bijeljina too ethnicity “does not serve as an all-encompassing unifying principle for construction of collective identity”, and, importantly, it does not do so “even when [it] is promoted by the general social context and political discourse” (Čapo-Žmegač 2007: 111). Therefore, ethnicity *does* matter, but some other social identifications –given their dependence on the presence of other social groups that one currently has a relationship with (Cohen 1994, 2001; Eriksen 2004)– become more salient and more relevant within the specific social circumstances and given the specific moment in time.

In addition, the fact that Bijeljina IDPs have been forcibly displaced does not make their ethnic identification process substantially different from the ethnic identification process of the local Bijeljina population, who, on their side, have not been forced to leave their homes. In other words, it does not seem that the experience of forcible displacement has made Bijeljina IDPs more conscious of their ethnic belonging, or 'more nationalistic' compared to their co-ethnics in Bijeljina. Therefore, ethnicity of Bijeljina IDPs does not represent the most prominent aspect of their identification process not only when their sense of the self is discussed within the local Bijeljina society, but when it is put in the perspective of their very forcible displacement experience, as well. As it was demonstrated in Chapter 6, the war and the forcible displacement have made Bijeljina IDPs fearful, distrustful, and antagonistic towards other Bosnian and Herzegovinian ethno-religious groups. However, contrary to what some other studies on the relationship between locals and newcomers in Bosnia and Herzegovina documented (Grandits 2007; Jašarević 2007; Lippman 2015; Pickering 2007; Stefansson 2006, 2007), these experiences did not radicalize IDPs (in terms of their nationalism, political extremism, and ethnic and religious chauvinism) any more than the war and the increased relevance of ethno-national identifications have radicalized the local Serb population in Bijeljina. For both of these population groups, the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has intensified their sense of belonging in ethnic terms, as they often base their perception of selves and others precisely on

their war experiences, whether they affected their lives in a more direct (IDPs) or indirect way (locals).

8.5. Between collective and individual integration: Who are *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina?

The group(s) of forcibly displaced persons in Bijeljina are *izbjeglice* who went through a common shattering displacement experience, and who have experienced enormous material and other losses, which are not less real and not less painful because these *izbjeglice* voluntarily chose resettlement over return. They are *izbjeglice* who stick together and help each other in overcoming different post-displacement difficulties, and who recognize that through unity and solidarity they can all get better and grow stronger. They are *izbjeglice* who originate from diverse regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, each with its unique history, tradition, and culture, which for many displaced persons represent the heritage worth protecting, and worth preserving for generations to come. They are *izbjeglice* who strongly identify with their respective ethnic group, but who, within their particular resettlement site, tend to define themselves less in relation to the 'ethnic other', than in relation to the 'social' and 'cultural other'. They are *izbjeglice* who could not take a dominant position in the local hierarchy immediately after their displacement, and who still feel that they need to fight for equal power with the local Bijeljinar population. Finally, they are *izbjeglice* of urban background, 'the people of industry', those who are culturally more advanced and sophisticated than an average *seljak* in Semberija, and who find it important to attain and maintain such superior position, as it secures the reconstruction of their pre-war social statuses, and creates a sense of continuation with their violently interrupted pre-displacement lives.

Nevertheless, the above image which Bijeljinar IDPs hold of themselves on a collective level, does not necessarily correspond to the image they hold of themselves and others on an individual level. Collective identities can be the same in their name, but they can be experienced differently by each member of the respective collective entity, and have different consequences for each of their lives (Cohen 2001; Jenkins 2008

[1996]). As the example of intermarriages shows, the existence and persistence of various simplified stereotypical images of the cultural other, which refuse to take individual variations into account, do not seem to threaten individual relationships between locals (*Semberci*) and newcomers (*izbjeglice*) in Bijeljina. On individual level, the members of the local and the displaced population in Bijeljina have been the closest neighbours, the best friends, and loyal colleagues and business partners for years, conscious of the fact that they share the same physical and social space, and largely depend on each other.

Social identities are also continuous processes that are being negotiated and renegotiated within different social contexts and in relation to different social circumstances (Eriksen 2004; Jenkins 2008 [1996]). Through unavoidably frequent individual encounters, various 'minor differences' between the local and the displaced population have been losing on their importance with the passage of time. As a consequence, *Semberci* and *izbjeglice* in Bijeljina have increasingly become mutually intertwined and brought closer together, in terms of their dialects, lifestyles, or different customs and religious ceremonies. Bearing in mind that the younger generations of both of these groups of Bijeljina population have taken the leading role within this ongoing converging process, their parents have become aware of the fact that their grandchildren, if not their children already, might have a different sense of collective 'belonging' in not so distant future. While expecting that their roots are not going to be forgotten, and their sacrifices not taken for granted, for many Bijeljina IDPs this raises a new kind of hope for a more socially and culturally unified 'future Semberija'.

9. References

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