None of us Dared Say Anything:

Mass Killing in a Bosnian Community during World War Two
and the Postwar Culture of Silence

by

Max Bergholz

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the requirements
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Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes the dynamics of mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region of Bosnia during 1941 in order to explain why a culture of silence crystallized after the Second World War about the murder of Muslim civilians by Serb insurgents. The main argument is that the silence about nearly 2,000 Muslim civilians massacred by Serb insurgents was rooted in the transformation of many of the perpetrators into members of the Communist-led Partisan resistance movement. After the war, the Communist authorities remained silent about the massacres to avoid implicating Partisan fighters as war criminals, and so too did the Muslim survivors out of fear and a desire to move on. The dissertation uncovers the emergence of the silence through an analysis of the actions of the local Communist authorities, the Muslim and Serb communities, and the interactions among them between the years 1941-1981. It studies the history of the silence through the categories of those who “were silenced” and those who “were silent,” concluding that the complicity of nearly all social groups was necessary for the maintenance of silence about the massacres, which everyone knew about, but almost no one spoke of publicly.
Through a detailed study of one Bosnian region over four decades this dissertation sheds light on the broader subjects of mass violence, remembrance, and national relations and identification in this part of Europe during the twentieth century. Specifically, it shows how the German invasion of Yugoslavia—and not widespread ethnic hatred among neighbors—triggered a small number of local extremists to engage in mass violence, which quickly cascaded into acts of attempted genocide and civil war. It illuminates how perpetrators of mass ethnic violence paradoxically were absorbed by guerrilla forces dedicated to multi-ethnic co-existence. It demonstrates how a Communist regime, which was explicitly committed to promoting the national equality of its multi-national population, ended up practicing a war remembrance policy that was profoundly skewed along national lines, and specifically against Muslims. It shows the concrete ways in which silence, a subject that historians of remembrance generally pay lip-service to but have yet to examine carefully, is created and enforced in the aftermath of mass killing. Finally, it argues that fixed notions of ethnic hatred or inter-ethnic friendship fail to grasp the highly fluid and situational nature of national relations and identification in multi-ethnic communities living in the shadow of mass killing.

This dissertation is based on three main sources: previously untapped archival documents, especially from the Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and the Archive of the Una-Sana Canton in Bihać; memoirs and testimonies written by participants in wartime events, including several unpublished manuscripts never used before by researchers; and numerous interviews conducted with survivors of mass killings and their children.
For my mother and father
Acknowledgments

The general subject of this dissertation began to emerge on a hot summer evening during 2003 in a café located in the Dorćol neighborhood of Belgrade. I was sitting with my friend Marija Ilić, a researcher in the Balkanological Institute at the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. At the time, I was in Serbia spending my days going from institute to institute, from professor to professor, searching for a thesis topic. Marija took great pleasure in shooting down my various ideas, often rolling her eyes and simply saying, “boring!” in response to my latest proposals for future research. On this evening she was particularly annoyed with what I had to say, and finally exclaimed: “Why don’t you research something important to us, something from history that still has relevance and divides us today, like the remembrance of the Second World War?” In retrospect, her challenge to research this complex and divisive topic marked the beginning of the long journey to this thesis. And this anecdote exemplifies how the direction of my work has been shaped by the input and support of friends, colleagues, and family, some of whom I would like to thank in the following pages.

To begin with, I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Lynne Viola, and my committee members, Professor Derek Penslar and Professor Jeffrey Kopstein, for supporting me during the past eight years while I have pursued my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto. Professor Viola deserves special thanks for offering critical support when I encountered serious problems during my first semester at Toronto. I am thankful for her exceptional generosity, goodwill, and professionalism. Professor Kopstein also deserves special thanks for agreeing to serve as the main reader for my comprehensive exam in 2004.
I am grateful to the scholars whom I had the good fortune to work with while completing my B.A. and M.A. studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Professors Neal Galpern, Orysia Karapinka, Alexander Orbach, William Chase, and Alejandro de la Fuente taught me how to read, write, think, and speak. The late Dennison Rusinow deserves special thanks for introducing me to the history of Yugoslavia in a course that he taught on the disintegration of that country in the spring of 1997. Professor Michael F. Jiménez was the most awe-inspiring intellectual I have ever met, and my encounter with him in an honors seminar during the fall of 1997 was of decisive importance in my choice to pursue a doctorate in history. His early death to cancer in 2001 was a tragedy not only for his family, friends, and colleagues, but also for all the students who will never have the chance to have their worlds transformed by his amazing intellect. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have been taught by him.

My years of research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia were supported by a number of fellowships and grants. I am thankful to the following organizations and institutions for support while I was doing field work and writing this thesis: the International and Research Exchanges Board (IREX), American Councils for International Education (ACTR-ACCELS), Fulbright (International Institute for Education—IIE), the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the American Historical Association (AHA), and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. At the University of Toronto I am grateful for the support given to me by the Department of History, the School of Graduate Studies, and the Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies. Finally, the Jackman Humanities Institute deserves thanks for awarding me a dissertation writing fellowship during my final years of work.
Anyone who has done research in Bosnia knows that success depends on the goodwill of friends and others willing to offer assistance. It is no exaggeration to say that I would never have completed this thesis without the group of people that helped me chase down the necessary materials. In Bihać, I am deeply grateful to Asija Filan of the Archive of the Una-Sana Canton. Without her phenomenal goodwill and willingness to drive boxes of dusty documents from the depot outside of town to the local museum, I would not have seen a single document of the rich collection in Bihać. I am grateful to the director of the archive, Mr. Fikret Midžić, who initially did everything in his power to block my research. He eventually became helpful, but I am thankful for his obstructionism, as it forced me to learn more about local Bosnian politics and life than I would have otherwise. I also met many wonderful people in Bihać as a result of his attempt to prevent me from conducting archival research. I am grateful to the director of the Museum of the Una-Sana Canton, Mr. Nijaza Maslak, who allowed me to read documents in his building. While working in Bihać I had the good fortune to encounter a fantastic group of people at the University Library. The director of the library, Alija Mesić, deserves thanks for making me feel at home while I conducted research. For generous assistance in finding materials, long coffee breaks, and friendship, I am extremely grateful to Enisa Keča, Dženita and Hana Halilagić, and Mehmed Dervišević. Finally, I owe a huge thank you to my friend Amela Mujagić, who offered support and friendship, especially during my struggle to gain access to the archive in Bihać.

In Sarajevo, I wish to thank Zoran Bibanović for agreeing to share with me his father’s unpublished manuscript about the wartime history of Kulen Vakuf. His trust and good faith are most appreciated. I am grateful to Gina Zorabdić, the head librarian at the
Institute for History in Sarajevo, for helping me find books and periodicals, and allowing me to copy them. Many thanks to the helpful staff of the Bosniak Institute who assisted me in locating a number of very important sources in their collection. I benefited enormously from the goodwill and professionalism of the staff of the State Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Special thanks are due to the archive’s director, Mr. Šaban Zahirović, who extended to me every courtesy, and bent rules to allow me to examine the exceptionally rich collection for the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am also deeply grateful to the archivist Mina Kujović, and librarian Fahrudin Kulenović, whose immense knowledge of sources on the history of Bosnia was astonishing and of great help in my research. Special thanks to Boro Jurišić and Sandra Biletić, whose generous day-to-day assistance in my research was truly remarkable. Sandra deserves a huge thank you not only for her assistance in the archive, but also for friendship and the many hours we spent watching DM Sat.

In Kulen Vakuf, and in the nearby villages of Klisa, Ostrovica, and Martin Brod, I met many remarkable people who were willing to discuss with me some of the most painful moments of their lives. I am not sure how I would have responded had someone showed up one day, as I did in these places, and began asking questions about extremely sensitive topics. I am deeply grateful for the willingness of nearly everyone I met in the region to speak about what they lived through. Special thanks are due to Muhamed Handžić, whom I met the first day I traveled to Kulen Vakuf in October 2006. He put me in contact with many people in the region, and conversations with them were of great use in the writing of this dissertation. My deepest thanks are due to Nataša “Džina” Kadić, moja “stara i zločesta” prijateljica, who took an interest in my research and offered a
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I wrote this dissertation in Toronto, primarily in cafes in my neighborhood and in libraries on the campus of the University of Toronto. I am grateful to those who work in Luna, Ezra’s Pound (on Dundas), Clafouti, Lettieri (in Yorkville), and El Almacen for putting up with me, my documents and books, and my laptop. I also wish to thank the staff of Robarts Library and Gerstein Science Information Centre.

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I grew up in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) and two individuals from that city deserve special mention: Andy Sheehan and Sue Van Doeren. Both came into my life at crucial moments and helped me to keep walking through the darkness until, one day, the sun finally broke through. That I am finishing this dissertation is in no small part due to them.
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Prologue

She has bleached blonde hair, a fair amount of eye makeup, and wears a long blue doctor’s style coat. We walk briskly down a dim corridor and then descend a staircase, winding around to the left and to the left once more, entering the basement. This is not a hospital morgue; it is a storage depot for an archive in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She inserts a small key into a lock of a rusted steel door and turns it. The sound of pieces of metal grinding against each other is startling, as if the door is groaning after having not been touched in decades. I lend a hand and we push it open together. There is only darkness. The air rushing out is cold and the smell of mildew overpowering. We step into the lightless room and, inhaling the dust that our feet kick up, begin coughing. No one has been here for years.

Click. My guide finds the light switch. The bare bulbs, one of which flickers, cast a dim glow onto the shelves which hold stack after stack of uncatalogued papers. These are Communist-era documents, never examined by anyone. Covered in a caked-on layer of soot, they are held together in bundles by fraying twine. She gives me fifteen minutes to look around. No more. After all, the rest of her colleagues will be drinking coffee together soon and she does not want to be late. “Besides,” she reminds me, “only the staff is supposed to be down here, and a foreigner like you? God protect me if anyone finds out!” I walk slowly through the stacks. Many of the light bulbs are burned out and frequently I am unable to read anything. Suddenly she appears out of the darkness and switches on a flashlight, laughing. Handing it to me without a word, she disappears. I have only a few minutes left. As I skim the barely legible handwriting on the folders, my eyes freeze on the following title: “Sites of Mass Killing in the Socialist Republic of
Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1983-1986.” The law on the use of archival documents in this country states that thirty years must elapse before materials can be released to the public. It is September 2006. I am supposed to wait at least nine more years before looking at these documents. I quickly pull the files off the shelf, stack them up against my chest and on top of my belt, lean back to distribute the weight, and walk to the entrance. She slams the metal door shut, and we make our way upstairs. Back in the reading room, she asks for the flashlight back and then offers me two objects: a knife to cut the string and a rag to clean the soot from the folders. I notice that it’s an old t-shirt for a baby.

This filthy fifteen minutes in the basement of a Bosnian archive is how this dissertation began, even though I didn’t know it at the time. After I wiped the soot off of the folders, and washed my hands two or three times, I sat down and began to read. What I discovered that day led me on a research pursuit which would consume the better part of the next three years. It took me far from the basement and reading room of the archive to towns and villages that I had never heard of. And it led me into the homes of people whose real-life tragedies stood behind the bureaucratic language I read in those forgotten, dusty government documents. This dissertation attempts to answer the questions that emerged that day while I read those files, which, according to the law, I shouldn’t have seen.
I don’t know how many of the Muslim people were killed. No one knows. No one ever made a list, no one on his own or with others ever collected such information, no one exaggerates or minimizes, quite simply—people stay silent.

Živojin Gavrilović, 1991

Introduction

On 20 June 1983, the organization of World War Two veterans in the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, known to most by its acronym SUBNOR, issued a classified directive to all of its municipal councils. “For us to obtain a complete picture of the wartime suffering,” it began, “we need you to send us detailed information about the sites of mass killing in your municipality (including places of slaughter, where people were thrown into pits, burned in houses, or killed in other ways).” They were to provide detailed answers to three questions: First, how many “Victims of Fascist Terror” had been killed in each municipality? Second, what were the nationalities of the victims? Third, had these sites of mass killing been marked with monuments? By 1986, after a number of delays caused by the difficulty of obtaining precise answers to such questions

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2 SUBNOR stood for Savez udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata [The Union of the Association of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War].

3 “Victims of Fascist Terror” [žrtve fašističkog terora] was a postwar Communist-created category for civilian war victims. It was assigned to those who were killed as noncombatants, either by the German or Italian armies or the various factions the Communist authorities grouped under the rubric “domestic traitors” [domaći izdajnici] (e.g., the Chetniks, Ustashas, etc.). See Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (ABiH), Fond Republički odbor Saveza udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Bosne i Hercegovine (SUBNOR BiH), Uputstvo za prikupljanje podataka o poginulim i preživjelim borcima Narodnooslobodilačkog rata od 1941-1945. i poginulim žrtvama fašističkog terora, undated document, 9-16

4 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Republički odbor, Pov. Broj: 05-7/83, 20 June 1983, 1-2. It should be noted that the two most powerful political organs in the republic, the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina [Predsjedništvo Socijalističke Republike Bosne i Hercegovine] and the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina [Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine], were the initiators of this project. On their involvement, see in Ibid., Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 1.
more than forty years after the end of the war, the project was completed. Out of the 1,014 sites identified where mass killings \(^5\) of civilians had taken place, it was found that only about one-third had been marked with monuments. \(^6\) In a number of cases, it was difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine the nationality of the victims. Yet, despite the incomplete nature of the data, one trend was clear: the sites where Muslim civilians had been murdered had the least number of monuments. In some areas, such as the Bosnian Krajina, eastern Bosnia, and Herzegovina, nearly every site remained unmarked. \(^7\) “More than forty years after the war,” the SUBNOR report stated, “people are still keeping quiet about the victims of Muslim nationality.” \(^8\) The report concluded that the reason for this situation was a lack of political will, and argued that something had to change: “We still don’t have the political bravery to tell the truth to the people. It is time to tell people about the tens of thousands of Muslims who we lost in the first days of the war.” \(^9\)

Why were so few monuments built in these places where Muslim civilians were killed? How was a public silence about these war victims possible in a country whose Communist leadership was explicitly committed to promoting the equality of all nationalities? The 1986 SUBNOR report does not provide answers to these questions.

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\(^5\) The definition of a site of mass killing appears to have been somewhat subjective, with municipalities often employing their own criteria. The municipality of Bihać, for example, defined a site of mass killing as a place where at least ten people were killed. See Ibid., Opštinski odbor (OO) SUBNOR Bihać, Predmet: Podaci o stratištima žrtvama fašističkog terora i žrtava rata na području opštine Bihać, 12 April 1985, 1.

\(^6\) Ibid., Osvrt na pregled stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora i njihove obilježenosti u Bosni i Hercegovini, November 1986, 4.

\(^7\) Ibid., Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 2, 4-5.

\(^8\) Ibid., Obrazloženje tabele, undated document, most likely June 1985, 6.

\(^9\) Ibid.
Unfortunately, neither does the existing scholarship on the remembrance of World War Two victims in Yugoslavia. Most studies by researchers based outside the countries of the former Yugoslavia argue that the Communist regime sought to “de-ethnicize” the remembrance of all the inter-ethnic violence of the Second World War in Yugoslavia for a host of reasons: to cement the legitimacy of the new state, to promote the “Brotherhood and Unity” \textit{[bratstvo i jedinstvo]} of all nationalities, to manage potentially explosive national relations, and to spread the blame for war crimes in an evenhanded way. This approach resulted in what some scholars have called “buried” and “suppressed” memories about the ethnically-driven wartime mass killing.\footnote{For the works that advance this view, see Bette Denich, “Dismembering Yugoslavia: Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide.” \textit{American Ethnologist} 21 (2) 1994, 367, 370, 372, 381, 383; Robert Hayden, “Recounting the Dead. The Rediscovery and Redefinition of Wartime Massacres in Late- and Post-Communist Yugoslavia,” in Rubie S. Watson, ed., \textit{Memory, History, and Opposition Under State Socialism} (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1994), 173; Wolfgang Hoeppken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia.” \textit{East European Politics and Societies}, Volume 13, No. 1, Winter 1999, 200, 204, 210; Jasna Dragović-Soso, ‘Saviours of the Nation.’ Serbia’s Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism (Montreal and Kingston – Ithaca: McGill & Queens University Press, 2002), 100, 103-104; Dejan Djočić, “The Second World War Two: discourses of reconciliation in Serbia and Croatia in the late 1980s and early 1990s,” \textit{Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies}, Vol. 4, No. 2, (2002), 132-133; Mate Tokić, “Framing and Reframing the Past: Ethnic Relations, Political Legitimacy and the Legacy of the Second World War in Socialist Yugoslavia.” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 2-11; Stevan Pavlowitch, “The Legacy of the Two World Wars,” in Lenard Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso, eds., \textit{State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration} (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2008), 86; Heike Karge, “Mediated remembrance: local practices of remembering the Second World War in Tito’s Yugoslavia.” \textit{European Review of History—Revue européenne d’histoire}, Vol. 16, No. 1, (February 2009), 54.} Yet the 1986 SUBNOR report reveals that, when it came to building monuments where Muslim civilians were killed, the Communist regime did not remember all war victims equally. The existing studies, which stress the “de-ethnicization” of all war remembrance, have failed to grasp the existence of inequalities in war remembrance according to nationality, particularly with regards to Muslim civilian war victims.
In contrast to the foreign scholarship, Bosniak (Muslim) scholars, as well as a handful of other researchers from the region, have confirmed the findings of the 1986 SUBNOR report in a number of studies published since 1990. Some have even claimed that the overall absence of monuments under the Communist regime on sites where Muslim civilians were murdered was the result of an intentional governmental policy of discrimination. But none of their studies provide an explanation for the emergence of this strange postwar silence. More recently, the Dutch anthropologist Ger Duijzings has suggested that the absence of monuments for Muslim civilian war victims resulted from a perception that they were “on the wrong side” during the war. But given that the overwhelming majority of these victims were on no side during the war, it is difficult to understand where this perception came from. In any case, Duijzings’ work does not clarify this issue. All of the existing literature on the remembrance of war victims in Yugoslavia thus leaves a crucial, but unanswered question: Why was there a silence in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina about Muslim civilians murdered during the Second World War?

11 For the most important scholarly works on the mass killing of Muslims during the Second World War in Yugoslavia (some of which are essentially document collections), see Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941-1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990); Semso Tucaković, Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima: 1941-1945 (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1995); Safet Bandžović, Ratna tragedija Muslimana (Novi Pazar: Sandžački odbor za zaštitu ljudskih prava i sloboda—Udruženje pisaca Sandžaka, 1993); Smail Čekić, Genocid nad Bošnjacima u Drugom svjetskom ratu: dokumenti (Sarajevo: Udruženje Muslimana za antigenocidne aktivnosti, 1996). For examples of non-scholarly sources which argue that the absence of monuments for Muslim civilian victims was a conscious policy of the Communist regime, see Mustafa Imamović, “Zločin i njegov opis,” Ogledalo, Godina 1, broj 2, prosinac/decembar 1990, 21; Hadžem Hajdarević, “Drina mezarluk koji teče,” in Ibid., 24-25.

This dissertation aims to provide a detailed answer to this question. It does so through an investigation of the wartime and postwar history of Kulen Vakuf, a small town located on the Una River in northwestern Bosnia. The SUBNOR report mentions this place on several occasions, noting that as many as two thousand innocent Muslim civilians—including men, women and children—were murdered there in early September 1941. This was one of the largest massacres of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, in which the most reliable demographers and historians estimate that a total of about 75,000 had been killed (roughly eight percent of their total population). Yet by the mid-1980s, not only had no monument been built in remembrance of these victims, none had ever been acknowledged as official civilian war victims, that is, as “Victims of Fascist Terror.” What took place in Kulen Vakuf in 1941 that resulted in

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13 Estimates of the percentage of Muslims killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina range from 6.4-9.1% of the Muslim population, or between 56,000-80,000 dead. However, these figures should be treated with caution for at least two reasons. First, as the case of Kulen Vakuf will show, thousands of Muslim civilian victims were never counted among the official war dead, and so the existing data that scholars have used to calculate wartime population losses has sizable limitations. Second, the death rate for Muslims varied dramatically by region. While the data presented by the most reliable demographers and historians show that roughly eight percent was the average death rate for Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the case of Kulen Vakuf reveals a death rate among Muslims in that municipality of closer to thirty to thirty-five percent. More regional-specific research would be required to fully grasp the nature of Muslim losses during war, with particular attention needing to be paid to Herzegovina, eastern Bosnia, and parts of the Bosnian Krajina, where the mass violence against Muslims was the most severe. For purposes of comparison, estimates of Serb losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and Croatia) range between 15.9-20.1% (307,000-389,000), and Croat losses between 4.4-6% (184,000-203,000). The figures for Serb losses are most likely the most reliable since counting Serb victims after the war was not a political problem, unlike the case of counting Muslim and Croat losses (the reasons for which will be discussed later in this thesis). On the subject of population losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia during the Second World War, see Bogoljub Kočović, Žrve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji (London: Biblioteka Naše delo, 1985), 62-66, 67-71; idem., Sahrana jednog mita. Žrve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji (Beograd: Otkrovenje, 2005), 48-52, 53-57, 164; Vladimir Žerjavč, Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u Drugom svjetskom ratu (Zagreb: Jugoslovensko viktimoško društvo, 1989), 39, 36, 61, 63, 154-171, 172-173; Tomislav Dulić, Utopias of Nation. Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitat, 2005), 301-324.

14 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 5; OO SUBNOR Bihać, Predmet: Podaci o stratištima žrtvama fašističkog terora i žrtava rata na području opštine Bihać, 12 April 1985, 1; Napomene uz Pregled stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora, June 1985, 6; Referat Mirka Vranić, undated document, 1; Osvrt na pregled stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora i njihove obilježenosti u Bosni i Hercegovini, November 1986, 9.
the mass murder of these innocent Muslim civilians? How and why did a silence about them come into existence after the war, which persisted all the way until the mid 1980s? Who was responsible for creating and maintaining it? What did the silence say about the nature of the Communist regime and the society it sought to govern? And what do answers to these questions tell us more generally about the dynamics of local mass violence in multi-ethnic communities in Europe, and especially the remembrance of it, in the years after 1945? In pursuit of answers to these questions, this dissertation takes up two challenges: first, to reconstruct and analyze the dynamics of mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region during the summer and early fall of 1941; second, to explain why a culture of silence about these killings crystallized during the years after the war. The main argument is that the silence about nearly 2,000 Muslim civilians massacred by Serb insurgents, many of whom were neighbors of the victims, was rooted in the transformation of many of the perpetrators into members of the Communist-led Partisan resistance movement. After the war, the Communist authorities remained silent about the massacres to avoid implicating Partisan fighters as war criminals, and so too did the Muslim survivors out of fear and a desire to move on.

The focus here on the creation and enforcement of silence goes against the grain of much of the scholarship on remembrance, particularly that of war, which has been produced during the past two decades. Armed with the now ubiquitous concepts of “collective memory,” “imagined communities,” and “invented traditions,” scholars have, especially since the late 1980s, increasingly focused attention on the ways in which social
groups use memories of the past in constituting their sense of self-identification. This voluminous scholarship has drawn attention to the importance of commemorations in the creation of socially-framed forms of remembrance. Among the key findings of these studies is that social groups constantly construct and reconstruct the past in light of the present, albeit within certain limits. This focus on commemorations understandably resulted in a general research bias on its most obvious forms, namely, those that are state-centered, as well as those practiced by other political and cultural elites. Such an approach was adopted in a number of important studies, particularly on the remembrance of war, which called attention to the specific ways in which elites and other influential social groups frame memories. A number of scholars have criticized this body of scholarship for paying inadequate attention to the conflicts involved in constructing

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17 See, for example, Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 51-52, who argues that “…in the modern period national elites have invented rituals that claim continuity with an appropriate historic past, organizing ceremonies, parades and mass gatherings, and constructing new ritual spaces.” Such rituals, says Connerton, are the commemorative means of transmitting social memory.

commemorative activities, as well as to the problem of popular reception to them. During the past decade or so, these subjects have begun to receive serious attention from historians and other scholars. Some have shifted away from the state-centered approach to the study of remembrance towards an analysis of the ways in which groups and individuals in “civil society” participate in acts of remembering and mourning, particularly for those killed in war.

Although the works that make up this body of scholarship differ in their emphasis on the role of elites versus non-elites in commemorative activities, and the importance of construction, contestation, and reception in studying acts of remembrance, they are nonetheless united in one key area: that forgetting and silence are crucial aspects in the process of remembering. It is therefore especially striking that, despite what one scholar has called the emergence of “the memory industry” in historical studies in recent years, these fundamental elements—of forgetting and silence—have received very little sustained theoretical and empirical attention. Ernest Renan argued in his famous 1882

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21 The key works in this field are Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); idem. and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); idem., Remembering War. The Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
essay “What is a Nation?”, that forgetting is as important to people in the process of constituting themselves as a “nation” as remembering. His provocative claim suggests that silence about historical events and memories, a prerequisite for the eventual forgetting of them, should also be a subject of central importance to historians interested in remembrance. And yet, the subjects of silence and forgetting are two that most historians have merely paid lip-service to, before going on to analyze commemorations and other visible acts of remembrance. In the large body of scholarship on remembrance, “silence” and “forgetting” thus have remained, for the most part, concepts lacking precise definition, theoretical explanation, and empirical investigation.

This dissertation is among the first attempts to investigate one of these concepts—silence—through a detailed local history of a community that experienced a particularly horrific episode of mass violence, and emerged from it not in conflict over how to commemorate the dead, but rather in silence. Defined here, silence is understood as the

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22 The phrase “memory industry” comes from Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” Representations, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering (Winter, 2000), 127.


25 The general lack of attention to these subjects by historians has not been replicated in the same way by anthropologists and philosophers. On forgetting, see, for example, Marc Augé, Oblivion, Trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004 [1998]); Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); on silence, see, for example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
conscious choice by people not to speak of certain events, about which they have intimate knowledge, because of a certain constellation of political, social, and psychological factors which make it virtually impossible to publicly talk about them.\(^{26}\) This type of silence was omnipresent in local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Second World War. While localized violence was a feature of the war in many other parts of occupied Europe, the victory of the multi-national Communist-led Partisan Movement in Yugoslavia ensured that the ethnic homogenization of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not occur at the end of the war.\(^ {27}\) As a result, neighbors who had murdered neighbors in the inter-ethnic violence that occurred in most local communities once again lived cheek-by-jowl with survivors and other perpetrators after 1945. With the Communist Party preaching the need for “Brotherhood and Unity”—an ideology that stressed the imperative to protect both the ethnic individuality and national equality of all citizens—silence about the inter-ethnic wartime violence was as ubiquitous, if not more so, as official commemorations glorifying the victorious Partisan Movement.

Investigating the dynamics of official war remembrance in Yugoslavia, while a worthwhile and important subject for research, has yielded results that essentially mirror

\(^{26}\) This definition draws, in part, on Jay Winter, “Thinking about Silence,” in Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: a social history of silence in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4. See also, Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room. Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2-3. As defined above, it should be clear that “silence” differs substantially from “forgetting,” which, following Yosef Yerushalmi, is defined here as the condition “when human groups fail—whether purposely or passively, out of rebellion, indifference, or indulgence, or as the result of some disruptive historical catastrophe—to transmit what they know of the past to their posterity.” Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 109.

the general experience of many other European societies. That is to say, like most other post-World War Two European governments, including those in the East and West, the Yugoslav Communist regime used commemorations of its wartime heroes and fighters as a way to shore up its legitimacy and to unify its population under the banner of national patriotism.²⁸ Throughout Europe, this generally resulted in a selective war remembrance in which, as the historian Tony Judt has argued, the memory of “things done by others to us” usually received great emphasis, while “things done by us to others” quickly got lost.²⁹

Such an approach to remembrance was especially problematic in Bosnia and Herzegovina because the categories of “us” and “them” were usually far from clear-cut; perpetrators of mass violence had sometimes switched sides during the war, with many having ended up fighting for the victorious Communist-led Partisan Movement.

²⁸ On the case of Yugoslavia, see Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society,” 197; Max Bergholz, “Među rodoljubima, kupusom, svinjama i varvarima: spomenici i grobovi NOR-a, 1947-1965. godine,” in Husnija Kamberović, ed., 60 godina od završetka Drugog svjetskog rata—kako se sjećati 1945. godine (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2006), 77-80; on France, see Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome, 10; on Belgium, Holland, and France, see Lagrou, The Legacy of Nazi Occupation, 3; on the Soviet Union, see Amir Weiner, Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17-21, 314, 338-342, who highlights the role not merely the role of the government, but also of Soviet citizens, especially war veterans, in the process of mythologizing the war; on the Soviet case, see also Nina Tumarkin, The Living and the Dead. The Rise and the Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia (New York: Basic Books, 1994); on this trend throughout the allied countries, see Judt, “The Past is another country: myth and memory in post-war Europe,” in Müller, ed., Memory and Power in Post-war Europe, 163.

Moreover, knowledge of this dynamic, and the fuzzy, often artificially-constructed lines between “us” and “them” was widespread in every local community. As a result, vast and total public silences needed to be constructed and vigorously enforced in order to cordon off memories of local wartime, usually ethnically-driven mass violence. These memories, of course, contradicted the regime’s rhetoric about the existence of wartime and postwar “Brotherhood and Unity” and national equality. The creation of silence about inter-ethnic wartime violence thus went hand-in-hand with the promotion of these official ideologies; the former—silence—was an essential constituting element which gave life to the latter.

This dissertation seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the process which resulted in the creation of one of these silences: the one that emerged about the mass killing of Muslim civilians in and around the town of Kulen Vakuf in September 1941. Investigating such a silence reveals an aspect of the war that the Communist regime feared precisely because it conjured up a past that threatened its legitimacy and ran counter to the ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity.” The story of Kulen Vakuf in 1941 was not that of a heroic battle between fascists and anti-fascists, as the Communist regime sought to portray the war in the decades following 1945. Rather, the wartime narrative of that small northwestern Bosnian community was like a dark alter ego.

Violence began in that region during the summer of 1941 with an initial wave of mass killings of Serbs which were carried out by a small number of local Croats and Muslims who had unexpectedly taken power due to the German invasion of Yugoslavia and the creation of the fascist Independent State of Croatia. Their violence against unarmed Serb civilians led to an armed insurgency that was made up largely of Serb
peasants, many of whom took up arms not only to save their lives but also to take revenge on their Croat and Muslim neighbors. The small number of Communists in the region faced sizable difficulties in attempting to mold these often chauvinistic and revenge-driven fighters into a multi-national guerrilla army fighting for socialist revolution. The climax of their failure was the massacre at Kulen Vakuf. As the war unfolded, the Communist-led Partisan Movement slowly gained the upper hand and eventually absorbed many of these Serb fighters into its ranks. After the war was over, this wartime dynamic resulted in the formation of a multi-faceted culture of silence about the mass killings of Muslim civilians, which the Communist regime, along with perpetrators and survivors, contributing to creating and enforcing. This was a story that held the potential to call into question the origins and wartime conduct of the Partisan Movement, and the legitimacy of the postwar Communist regime. The mass killings of Muslims in Kulen Vakuf by many who eventually became Partisan fighters epitomized the frightening absence of “Brotherhood and Unity” among those fighters in the early years of the war. As such, the history and remembrance of the massacres was something that the Communist regime endeavored to silence.

Investigating the creation and enforcement of this silence in one Bosnian community reveals the specific ways in which the Communist regime attempted to deal with a politically sensitive and painful event from the war. Moreover, uncovering the local history of the origins and making of this silence illuminates more generally how the regime endeavored to carry out one of its most complex and contradictory postwar objectives: using the remembrance of the war, in spite of the vast amount of inter-ethnic violence which occurred, as a basis for the creation of a multi-ethnic socialist state. By
investigating this silence through the lens of a single Bosnian community, this dissertation not only sheds light on the ways in which the Communist regime pursued this contradictory objective; it also seeks to illuminate the myriad ways in which the perpetrators and survivors of the massacres in the Kulen Vakuf region, as well as those born in later generations, were complicit in creating and maintaining the silence. As such, this dissertation seeks to study the origins and enforcement of silence after mass violence both from above and below, that is, through the actions of political elites as well as those taken in everyday life by common citizens.30

Unfortunately, there is relatively little theoretical and empirical literature written by historians on the subject of silence, especially on the concrete reasons for its existence and maintenance after periods of mass violence. However, awareness of the importance of the subject to history, while perhaps something “new” to the field of historical memory studies, is, in fact, a topic that has received substantial attention from philosophers and scholars in other disciplines. Writing in 1948, the Swiss philosopher Max Picard analyzed silence from a multiplicity of angles, and directed a part of his discussion specifically to historians:

…silence is as much a part of history as noise; the invisible as much a part of history as the visible. But roughly since the French Revolution man has taken note only of the loud facts of history. He has overlooked the things of silence which are just as important. …there are periods in history in which the silence is more evident than the noise. History does not flow in a straight line from the noise of one age to the noise of the next. The flow of noise is sometimes interrupted by an age of silence.31

30 Despite the recent flood of literature on the remembrance of the Second World War, a number of scholars have noted that attention to how local communities coped in the aftermath of the war has been surprisingly scant. On this point, see Francesca Cappelletto, ed., Memory and World War Two: An Ethnographic Approach (Oxford: Berg, 2005). For a detailed analysis of how a local community in Western Serbia dealt with the remembrance and silence about its fallen soldiers in the shadow of the civil war that took place in that region during and after the Second World War, see Max Bergholz, “When All Could No Longer Be Equal in Death: A Local Community’s Struggle to Remember Its Fallen Soldiers in the Shadow of Serbia’s Civil War, 1955-1956,” The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, No. 2008 (November 2010), 1-58.
Despite Picard’s call to investigate periods of silence in the past, it was not historians, but rather mostly scholars in communication and rhetoric who took up his challenge to make silence a central focus of investigation. Their research explored the rhetoric of silence, both as a means of oppressing others and, perhaps paradoxically, as a way of “speaking out.” These works highlight the fact that silence is not merely a passive activity; it usually has an expressive power because in choosing to remain silent people still “speak.” Understood this way, the study of silence appears as a complex social process and demands that several interrelated questions be asked: Who silences? Who is silenced? Who chooses to remain silent? And why?

Until very recently, most scholars have not devoted much attention to rigorously investigating the historical factors involved in the creation and maintenance of silences. Instead, some have understood the question of silence simply in terms of finding ways to give voice to groups and individuals that have been silenced in the past for various reasons, while neglecting to analyze what brought about their silencing in the first place. Others have discussed the presence and dynamics of ongoing silences, such as that about homosexuality in the Catholic Church, but have not provided much historical perspective in their analyses. Psychologists and others, particularly those interested in the case of Nazi Germany, have carried out numerous interviews with perpetrators and


33 See, for example, Sider and Smith, *Between History and Histories*, 3-28.

34 On the silence about homosexuality in the Catholic Church, see Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom. Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
survivors of the Holocaust, as well as with their children, in pursuit of better understanding how people have practiced maintaining silence in the context of their families. Yet these studies have also shied away from explaining in a detailed way the specific historical factors that led to the creation of silence.\textsuperscript{35} Other scholars, including some historians, have pointed out instances in which governments and other elites have sought to silence the survivors of large-scale tragedies, such as collectivization in the Soviet Union or the rape of German women by occupation soldiers in Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest, as well as how such victims silenced themselves.\textsuperscript{36} Some have gone as far as to suggest general reasons for the creation of these silences. Yet, for most of these scholars, conducting detailed research into specific instances in order to uncover who exactly did the silencing, how they did so, and why, generally have remained unexplored terrain.\textsuperscript{37}


It is only within the last several years that historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have begun to carry out sustained research on the subject of silence. Eviatar Zerubavel and Jay Winter have recently written articles and books about the general dynamics of silence, both highlighting its socially-constructed nature, as well as the importance of understanding its creation and maintenance in relation to political factors.38 Exemplifying the infancy of the field, the most sustained historical treatment of the subject to date is not a monograph but rather an edited volume of essays published in 2010 by Efrat Ben Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter on the subject of silence in the aftermath of war.39 This important collection has taken up the challenge of linking theoretical insights about silence with a host of empirical case studies from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. The chapter by Ben-Ze’ev on the silences of Palmach soldiers in Israel (i.e., elite units of Jewish soldiers that fought in the 1948 war) stands out as a detailed and insightful piece of scholarship that illuminates the concrete mechanisms that former soldiers used to silence their unromantic war experiences.40 Still, an overall weakness of the volume is that a number of chapters tend to be very general and offer somewhat static sketches about what has been left out of public discussion after various instances of war. In addition, there is relatively little attention in most of the essays to how specific forms of wartime violence affect the emergence of postwar silence. As a result, the reader is frequently left wondering how, specifically, these silences were


39 See Ben-Ze’ev, Ginio, and Winter, Shadows of War.

created in response to different types of violence, who maintained them, why they changed over time, and how these dynamics unfolded in concrete ways in local communities.41

Answering these kinds of questions through a detailed case study is one of the main gaps in the historiography on remembrance that this dissertation aims to contribute to filling. Investigating the history of silence is necessarily an examination of the function of power in a given society. Some scholars, such as Paul Connerton, while leapfrogging over the subject of silence directly to “forgetting,” have proposed a simply binary theoretical model for studying these related, but distinct subjects. For him, a regime, especially an authoritarian one, simply seeks to obliterate society’s memories. “All totalitarianisms behave this way; the mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when their memories are taken away.”42 While capturing in a basic, if not crude way one important aspect of how the silence in the case of the massacres in Kulen Vakuf was created, this formulation fails to grasp the complexity of what led people in that community not to speak publicly about the killings. As will be seen, nearly everyone in that community played a role in the creation and enforcement of the silence, both the politically strong and weak. Connerton’s top-down, simple binary model, versions of which have often directed the state-centered analyses of other scholars in their studies of remembrance, is insufficient as an investigative tool in the complex case of Kulen Vakuf.

41 For another important piece of recent scholarship that deals in part with the topic of silence, but also suffers from some of the same weaknesses as the collection of essays discussed here, see Jim House and Neil Macmaster, Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
42 Connerton, How Societies Remember, 14.
A more useful theoretical approach comes from Michel Foucault. He conceives of power not simply as one group’s domination over another; rather, all people “are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power,” however asymmetrically.\(^{43}\) With regard to the silence in Kulen Vakuf, this formulation suggests that we should take seriously the role that all individuals played in its creation and enforcement, however politically unequal their relations of power may have been.\(^{44}\) Viewed this way, it becomes possible to conceive of the postwar silence in Kulen Vakuf not merely as the result of certain groups “being silenced” by others, as Connerton’s model would suggest; rather, one must also take into consideration those who chose to “be silent” for various reasons. This was also a way of exercising power in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, as will be seen, was a crucial aspect in the creation and maintenance of the silence that crystallized in the Kulen Vakuf region after 1945.\(^{45}\)

Yet uncovering concrete instances of “being silenced” and “being silent,” while a fruitful theoretical point of departure, is nevertheless a difficult task for the historian to carry out. Unlike commemorations and other visible acts of remembrance for the dead, acts of silence often remain hidden from view in the traditional sources, such as archival documents, used in historical research. People who construct monuments, stage


\(^{44}\) The philosopher Paul Ricoeur notes a similar dynamic at work while discussing the process of forgetting. While analyzing the process whereby social actors are stripped of the ability to recount their actions themselves, he notes that “this dispossession is not without a secret complicity, which makes forgetting a semi-passive, semi-active behavior…” See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 448-449.

celebrations, and write books and articles about those killed in war usually leave behind sources for historians interested in researching the dynamics of remembrance; those who were silenced, or who chose to remain silent, generally have not produced the same kind of materials. However, sources that shed light on the subject of silence do exist, although they are often found in unorthodox places or perhaps locked away in archives for various reasons. For example, the initial files that led to this dissertation were found uncatalogued, bound in string, and officially unavailable, in a storage depot in the basement of the largest archive in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the most important sources used in this dissertation for reconstructing the massacres in Kulen Vakuf was an unpublished manuscript written by Esad Bibanović, who narrowly escaped being killed in 1941. He was born in that town and was a member of the Communist Party. Despite having spent time in the Goli Otok prison camp after the war, he conducted his own research into the massacres during the 1960s and 1970s, and in so doing recorded crucial testimony from survivors.\footnote{Bibanović was apparently accused of having been a supporter of Stalin in 1948, although he believed the real reason for his imprisonment in 1952 had to do with a conflict he had while working during the postwar years as a judge for the regions [srezovi] of Zvornik, Vlasenica, and Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia.} Local residents in Kulen Vakuf and the surrounding region spoke about Bibanović’s writings, and eventually his son Zoran was gracious enough to make a copy of this manuscript available for the purpose of writing this dissertation. Other participants in local wartime events, especially former Partisan fighters, eventually wrote memoirs or recorded brief testimonies about aspects of events in the Kulen Vakuf region during 1941, most of which were published during the 1970s and 1980s. Although most of these writings are purely descriptive accounts, usually with the purpose of documenting atrocities, they nevertheless provide a wealth of specific information about wartime events. Of particular importance for this dissertation is Bibanović’s...
manuscript, which is the only surviving text which includes testimonies from both Serb and Muslim survivors of the mass killings in the Kulen Vakuf region during 1941. These parts of his text, along with his recollections of life in Kulen Vakuf in the years before the Second World War, must of course be read critically; yet, their importance cannot be overstated given that they are among the only available primary sources for the historian interested in reconstructing the prewar and wartime history of that region.

Residents of Kulen Vakuf, including Muslims and the few Serbs who still live there, as well as those living in nearby villages such as Klisa, Ostrovica and Martin Brod, agreed to be interviewed for this research. Their testimonies are essential sources for the reconstruction of the history of the wartime and postwar period, and particularly for understanding the micro-dynamics of how silence was created and enforced at the level of everyday life. The role played by the most recent war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) in structuring interviewees’ memories of the Second World War and postwar period was clear in nearly every interview. The losses and traumas they endured during the first half of the 1990s continue to exert a powerful force on how they recount the events of 1941 and the decades that followed. This obviously presented problems in terms of assessing the reliability of a given individual’s testimony about the pre-1992 period. However, survivors (and their children) were nonetheless often able to provide specific answers to basic questions such as where killings took place, how people were able to escape, who helped them do so, where monuments were constructed, and what was the nature of the conflicts over building them. Like the manuscripts and memoirs, these oral testimonies must be evaluated critically, but they provided an important source in reconstructing the events of 1941 and postwar period.
The enormous archival holdings in the Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Central Committee of the League of Communists for Bosnia and Herzegovina [*Fond Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine*], which have been generally off limits to researchers since the start of the 1992-1995 war, were eventually made available in the course of conducting research for this dissertation. These official documents, as well as those produced by the Land Commission for Determining the Crimes of Occupiers and Their Collaborators [*Fond Zemaljske komisije za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomogača*], yielded crucial information on the massacres, as well as on the creation of the postwar silence about them. Similarly, documents in the Archive of the Una-Sana Canton in the city Bihać [*Arhiv Unsko-sanskog kantona u Bihaću*], while officially unavailable due to the archive’s disorganization and the lack of an adequate facility in which to read them, were eventually released after a long struggle with the director of that institution. These materials, especially those for the regional and municipal committees of the League of Communists [*Sreski i opštinski komiteti Saveza komunista*] allowed for the reconstruction of the postwar political life of the Kulen Vakuf region, and included important local details relevant to the creation and enforcement of the silence about the massacres.

One must be aware that the commissions set up by the Communist Party that investigated war crimes conducted their work in a particular political context and with clear political objectives, such as settling scores with wartime enemies and postwar political opponents. As a result, the survivors of mass killings who gave testimonies were under political pressure, which colored what they said, and this provides the historian with a skewed portrait of wartime events. Furthermore, these testimonies, while
extremely useful in constructing a portrait of how civilians experienced the violence, do not provide much information about the perpetrators, especially their prewar experiences and motivations for participating in the killings. As for the local and regional committees of the League of Communists, their members had specific postwar political concerns which determined what kind of information they recorded in their documents and, moreover, whether or not such information was sent to be preserved in their archives. One must be aware that these materials often conceal as much as they reveal and the documents must therefore be read critically and compared to other sources when possible.

It should be noted that the unusual amount of upheaval in the region under investigation, which included the town of Kulen Vakuf and its neighboring Muslim villages being attacked and partially or, in some cases, completely destroyed in both 1941 and 1992, presents the historian with sizable obstacles. In each wave of destruction much valuable archival material was burned, and many citizens were killed or dispersed, with some survivors never returning to their homes. All of these events have impoverished the available source base for the researcher interested in reconstructing and analyzing the history of this part of the world. The reader should bear this in mind when confronting questions in this thesis that the limited number of sources allow only partial answers to be offered.

All of the materials used here—from memoirs and oral testimonies, to uncatalogued and difficult-to-obtain documents—form the evidentiary foundation on which this dissertation is based. The principle method used in analyzing these materials was triangulation. Accounts read in memoirs were compared to oral testimonies which
were then compared to whatever archival evidence was available. In many cases, examining these three types of sources in this way allowed for the corroboration of facts and interpretations. And from such comparisons it became possible to slowly piece together a coherent narrative of the wartime and postwar period. In other cases, the discrepancies among the sources were so vast that certain details had to be discarded, or mentioned only in conditional ways. The struggle to obtain all of the materials used in the writing of this dissertation was perhaps greater than what would be expected. However, in retrospect, given that the subject at hand is the silence about a politically sensitive massacre in a country still living in the shadow of a recent war (1992-1995), in retrospect it should not be surprising that the search for evidence was a struggle that unfolded in unexpected places and often in the face of considerable resistance. The ongoing political turbulence and general disarray in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina was a factor that presented sizable difficulties in obtaining sources for the writing of this dissertation.

In exploring the creation and enforcement of silence about the massacres in Kulen Vakuf, this dissertation adopts a largely narrative structure of analysis. It focuses on a forty-year period from the time of the mass killings in the Kulen Vakuf region during the summer and early autumn of 1941 until the unveiling of the first war monument for fallen Partisans in the town of Kulen Vakuf in 1981. Before moving to an analysis of the postwar silence, the main task is to provide the first exhaustive reconstruction and analysis of the dynamics of mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region, with special emphasis on the summer and early autumn of 1941.\textsuperscript{47} Chapter One sets the stage for this

\textsuperscript{47} There are seven main texts which provide some degree of description and analysis of the mass violence in the Kulen Vakuf region during 1941, with specific reference to the mass killings of Muslims. These
objective by sketching out the pre-World War Two history of the town and its region, with special emphasis on relations between Muslims and Orthodox Christians (who, by the end of the nineteenth century, had begun to refer to themselves as “Serbs”). The purpose of this survey is to show the existence of a tradition of conflict, which was based on disputes related to the region’s agrarian question, as well as a traditional of inter-confessional-national solidarity. Chapter Two is primarily devoted to a detailed reconstruction of wartime events in the Kulen Vakuf region between April 1941, when the Ustasha regime came to power, and early September of that year, when the massacres of the region’s Muslims took place. This long chapter is divided into four sections: Part I reconstructs the Ustasha mass killings of Serbs. Aside from outlining the main instances of Ustasha terror, the section argues that, although the Ustasha units were composed of both Muslims and Croats, their numbers reflected less than one percent of the population of those two groups in the region. Part II shows how these mass killings led to a Serb insurgency. This section discusses the difficulties that the small number of Communists in the area had in trying to organize the insurgents into a disciplined guerilla army fighting for socialist revolution. It also demonstrates that these Serb peasant fighters, who initially rose up to save their lives, ended up committing mass killings of Croats in

include the following: Esad Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena (Unpublished manuscript, 2008); idem. “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” in Bihać u novoj istoriji (1918-1945) Tom I. (Banjaluka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1978), 419-455; Danilo Damjanović-Danić,” Pad Kulen Vakufa,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga I. (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 664-670; Pero Pilipović, “Istina o jednom zloćinu,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga II. (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 603-605; Safet Bandžović, Rata tragedija Muslimana (Novi Pazar: Sandžacki odbor za zaštitu ljudskih prava i sloboda—Udruženje pisaca Sandžaka, 1993), 25-31; Abas Mušeta, Kulen Vakuf. Tragedija od 10.04 do 06-18.09 1941 godine (Unpublished manuscript); Marko Atilla Hoare, Genocide and Resistance in Hitler’s Bosnia. The Partisans and Chetniks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 106-108. To a greater or lesser degree, all of these works provide some useful information about the wartime history of Kulen Vakuf, especially during 1941. Yet, in critical ways, all fail to provide sufficient context and explanation, and therefore none can be characterized as exhaustive attempts to reconstruct and analyze the origins and dynamics of mass violence in the region.
the region that in method did not differ from those committed by the Ustashas. Part III reconstructs the massacres of 6-8 September 1941 which Serb insurgents carried out against the Muslim civilian population. It shows that many of those who committed the mass killings were under the command of Communist leaders, and were later joined by other Serbs who took part in the murders in order to take revenge against all their Muslim neighbors whom they held collectively responsible for the Ustasha killings earlier in the summer. Part IV argues that, aside of a handful of individuals who left the incipient Partisan units for the Chetniks later on in 1941 and 1942, the vast majority of the Serb insurgents who carried out the massacres ended up as Partisan soldiers and officers by the end of the war. Chapter One concludes by arguing that the Partisan Army that declared victory in the Kulen Vakuf region in 1945 included many Serbs who sincerely supported the new Communist regime and its desire to build a society based on the principle of “Brotherhood and Unity”; yet it also included large numbers of Serb fighters who carried dark secrets of having murdered their Muslim neighbors in September 1941.

Chapter Three is devoted to analyzing the everyday experience of the Muslims who returned to the Kulen Vakuf region after the war, and the political context in which they found themselves. The analysis shows that while most were happy to have returned to their home region and were determined to rebuild their communities, they faced a hostile political environment in the first years after the war. The overarching politics of the Serb-dominated Communist regime, though not explicitly anti-Muslim, were formulated to subdue Islamic religious practice and did not recognize Muslims as an official nationality. Moreover, the regime’s investigations and prosecutions of war criminals revealed its political bias by not punishing any of those who committed the
massacres of Muslims in Kulen Vakuf, despite having accumulated a significant amount of evidence about the killings.

Chapter Four explains how a culture of silence came into existence about the massacres of the Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region. It argues that the silence was based on five elements: the prohibition of exhuming and burying the bodies of the victims; the absence of any trials of those responsible for the killings and the resulting regular encounters between survivors and perpetrators; the pervasive sense among Serbs in the region that Kulen Vakuf, and the rest of the Muslim villages in the region, was an “Ustasha place;” the traumas and fears which the survivors lived with; and the zeal with which Muslim Communists promoted the ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity.” The chapter argues that these factors, which included certain groups “being silenced” and others choosing to “be silent,” created in the postwar years an atmosphere in which, despite the widespread knowledge of the mass killings, everyone learned to keep quiet about them.

Chapter Five switches focus to the region’s Serb community and analyzes how the Serbs who survived the Ustasha mass killings dealt with their losses after the war. The chapter argues that the Communist regime treated Serb civilian war victims in vastly different ways from their Muslim counterparts, which included conducting postwar trials of suspected Ustasha war criminals; counting Serb civilian war victims as “Vehicles of Fascism,” which erased their nationality but nonetheless publicly recognized them as official war victims; and by granting permission for the exhumation and burial of their remains, as well as for the construction of monuments. The chapter concludes by explaining the different experiences of Serbs and Muslims in light of the specific
dynamics of wartime violence in the region. The main argument is that those guilty of murdering Serbs could be easily categorized as “fascists,” while many of those responsible for killing Muslims had in the course of the war transformed into Partisans. Thus, Muslim civilian victims could not be included in the official Communist category of “Victims of Fascist Terror,” as no “fascists” could be identified as their murderers.

Chapter Six looks at both the Muslim and Serb communities by analyzing national relations in the Kulen Vakuf region in the aftermath of the wartime mass killing. The chapter demonstrates that in some cases the massacres paradoxically strengthened relations between individuals of different nationalities because of the lengths some went to in order to save the lives of their neighbors. At the same time, the killings left others deeply embittered and locked in a mindset in which national differences, and especially events from the war, were of crucial importance in determining friends and enemies. A much larger group appears to have been capable of getting along at the level of everyday interaction, in large part due to the Communist regime’s intensive work on promoting and policing “Brotherhood and Unity.” The chapter illuminates an important dynamic in which large numbers of people could rapidly change their views of their neighbors of different nationalities in the aftermath of incidents (e.g., fights, murders, etc.), switching from positive relations to calling for revenge against entire nationalities. Incidents that conjured up painful memories from the war were usually a factor in such instances. The chapter concludes by analyzing how the Communist regime attempted to use war remembrance to promote “Brotherhood and Unity.” The case of Kulen Vakuf demonstrates that the need to maintain silence about the massacres of the Muslims ultimately was more important than promoting national equality. Indeed, the Communist
regime characterized Muslims as “chauvinists” who asked why monuments could be built for Serb “Victims of Fascism” but not for Muslims murdered by Serb insurgents in 1941.

Chapter Seven examines the economic and political transformations that took place in the Kulen Vakuf region from the end of the war until the early 1970s. These changes ultimately resulted in substantial economic growth, the demographic expansion of the Muslim population, recognition of the Muslims as an official nationality, and their increased presence in leadership positions in the League of Communists and offices of local government. These structural transformations created a context for two contradictory tendencies when it came to the silence about the 1941 massacres. Some who benefited from the dramatic improvements believed that raising questions about the mass killings could contribute nothing positive to improving life in the present. At the same time, a handful of others were emboldened to publicly voice their desires for monuments to be built for the victims. The emergence of these calls for monuments illuminated the pervasive nature of the culture of silence and the contradictory and opportunistic behavior of the Communist regime. In several cases, Muslims were the most vocal in silencing fellow Muslims. At the same time, the authorities had no qualms about shutting down several proposals, despite the fact that those who made them had formulated their requests explicitly in accordance with the regime’s principles of national equality and “Brotherhood and Unity.”

Chapter Eight presents a comparative analysis of the two memorials unveiled in 1981 in the greater Kulen Vakuf region. One was a large monument park erected for “Victims of Fascist Terror” on a site where Serbs had been murdered by UstASHAs; the other was built in the town of Kulen Vakuf for Partisans from the region. While the
monument park was intended to be for all “Victims of Fascist Terror,” its location on a site where Serbs had been the primary victims ultimately contributed to the sense that only Serb civilian war victims could be publicly remembered. As such, the monument represented the physical enshrinement of the silence about the Muslim victims. The monument for Partisans in Kulen Vakuf had the same effect, but for different reasons. That memorial included the names of 147 Partisan fighters from the region, the vast majority Serbs. The local authorities wanted to use the monument to refute the widespread notion that Kulen Vakuf was an “Ustasha place.” Yet local Muslims claimed that some of the names carved on the monument were those of men who had participated in the massacres of Muslims in 1941. The chapter concludes by arguing that this monument decisively contributed to the enshrinement of the silence by memorializing some of the perpetrators while concealing the mass killings.
1. Map of Federal Yugoslavia. Source: Adapted by the author from a map produced by the GIS and Cartography Office at the University of Toronto.
Chapter One

The Kulen Vakuf Region before 1941

The Una River flows out of the forbidding mountains that separate northwestern Bosnia from Croatia. Its waters are cold and pure, and, because of a specific mix of sediment, are “agleam with gold and emerald” when the sun beams down, an English traveler to the region noted in the 1870s.\(^48\) Sometimes rushing furiously over waterfalls and often simply quietly gurgling along, the Una is eventually joined by a much smaller river called the Ostrovica. At the confluence between the two, one looks up from the valley and sees an old fortress dominating the heights of a nearby mountain ridge. Surrounded by thick woods on all sides, its ancient walls, although crumbling and decaying, still appear impossible to breach.

It was here at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century that Muslims, having fled from towns such as Udbina in the region of Lika (present-day Croatia) in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat at Vienna in 1689, began to build a town on a small island between the two rivers. Its Turkish name, pronounced in the local Slavic language as Džisri-kebir [Great or Long Bridge], referred to the wooden bridge built over the crystal clear waters of the Una River that connected the town with the rest of Bosnia. But it was also known as Palanka Mahmut-paše Kulenovića [The Province of Pasha Mahmut Kulenović], named after a man who had once been an Ottoman commander of the old fortress located on the ridge high above in the first half of the eighteenth century. During that time, he ordered that a mosque be built in the center of the town for Sultan Ahmed II. It had a towering white minaret that reached for the sky,

\(^{48}\) Sir Arthur J. Evans, Illyrian Letters. A Revised Selection of Correspondence From the Illyrian Provinces of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia, Addressed to the “Manchester Guardian” During the Year 1877 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007 [1878]), 114.
and a small walking street ran through an arch built underneath that was filled with shops selling spices, produce, and gold work. Pasha Mahmut Kulenović declared that after his death most of his property was to be left to the mosque. According to Islamic tradition, such a religious endowment is known as a *wakf* (as transliterated from Arabic), and in Bosnia is pronounced as “vakuf.” And so, from around the second half of the eighteenth century, the town became known as “Kulen Vakuf,” as a sign of respect for the man whose wealth had built its largest and most famous mosque.49


The Ottoman conquest and settlement of the region took place in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It resulted in the formation of two main social classes: on one side were the *askeri*, who were soldiers or state officials, and exclusively Muslims by confession; on the other was the “*raya*” (literally “the flock”), or the subjects, the revenue producing, subordinate class, and predominately Christian (including a majority of Orthodox and minority of Catholics).\(^50\) In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, large numbers of Christians converted to Islam, in part due to Ottoman policies of land tenure in which male Muslims were offered land in exchange for military service. This created an indigenous Muslim landowning class that collected dues from its largely Christian tenants (usually one-third of all produce, while another tenth was paid to the central Ottoman authorities).

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Both the founding and subsequent growth of Kulen Vakuf in the first half of the eighteenth century was intimately connected to a series of wars and postwar crises that deeply impacted the western borderlands of the Ottoman Empire. The Austro-Ottoman War of 1683-1699 resulted in the Ottomans losing a sizable amount of territory along their northwestern border, as did more wars in the 1710s and 1730s. To forestall further losses, the Ottomans reorganized their military units in the region, creating a series of new defensive subdivisions known as *kapetanije*. Each covered a town, its main roads, and nearby countryside. A commander known as a *kapetan* was in charge of these precincts.\(^52\)

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\(^51\) On the Ottoman Empire’s system of land tenure and military service in Bosnia, see Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka* (Novi Pazar: Centar za bošnjačke studije, 2007), 113-124.
The development of the town of Kulen Vakuf was made possible by the establishment of a kapetanija in the fortress located on the mountain ridge above the confluence of the Una and Ostrovica Rivers, known as Stara Ostrovica. The first commander of the precinct was Salih-aga Kulenović, who, like many of the region’s Muslims, appears to have come to the area from Udbina not long before 1699, when the Ottoman Empire lost control of that town to the Austrians. From this time on, members of the Kulenović family ran the kapetanija and established themselves as the most powerful family in the region. While officially appointed by the Sultan, the Kulenović kapetans policed public order, gained significant authority in military matters, controlled trade, and oversaw the collection of many taxes. They served life-long appointments and, over time, transformed the position of kapetan into a hereditary office.53

The ongoing wars along the borderlands resulted in the steady increase of taxes to finance military actions. This empowered the local Muslim landowning elite, with the Kulenović kapetans at the helm, to increasingly exploit the region’s largely Orthodox Christian peasantry. Corrupt practices ensued, such as tax-farming, which impoverished the peasants and transformed them during the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries into landless sharecroppers.54 This trend caused most to become resentful and bitter toward their Muslim landlords. At the same, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a growing Muslim hostility towards Christians, as the

52 On the history of the kapetanije, see Hamdija Kreševljaković, Kapetanije u Bosni i Hercegovini (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1980 [1953]).

53 Ibid., 180-182; On the kapetans more generally, see Hajdarpašić, “Whose Bosnia?, 77-78; On the Kulenović family, see Husnija Kambarović, Begovski zemljišni posjedi u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1878. do 1918. godine (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest-Zagreb; Institut za istoriju-Sarajevo, 2003), 398-409; See also Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 8-13.

ongoing Ottoman military losses to the Austrians and Russians led to the suspicion that local Catholics and Orthodox were sympathizing with the “Christian” enemy. This sentiment resulted in a number of repressive practices, such as prohibiting the construction of churches from around the 1740s onward.\(^{55}\) The Habsburg war of the 1780s and the Serbian Uprising of 1804-1813 only increased fears about the “Christian” encroachment around Bosnia, and this led to more anxiety about the sympathies of local Bosnian Christians, which in turn fueled Muslim hostility towards them. The establishment of regional consuls in Bosnia during the 1840s for Austria, France, Russia, Italy, England, and Prussia introduced new political actors into the region who often asserted themselves as the protectors of the Bosnian Christians. This development only added to Muslim fears and resentments towards their non-Muslim neighbors.

By the first part of the nineteenth century, arbitrary abuse, both physical and verbal, of Bosnian Christians by embittered Muslim notables had become more frequent. A Muslim merchant from Kulen Vakuf once told a foreign traveler about what Tahir-beg Kulenović, a wealthy landowner from the same town, would do whenever he would visit the nearby Orthodox monastery in Rmanj, which was located on property that he owned: “…he rode on horseback into the church and profaned it. After that he was in the habit of dismounting, and, seizing the priest’s vestments, he made them into a kind of saddle, set them on the priest’s back, and then mounting on it himself, made the wretched pope crawl around on all fours and serve the purpose of a beast till the poor man sank with exhaustion.”\(^{56}\) Such abusive and humiliating behavior, largely rooted in Muslim

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 99-100.

anxieties about the advance of Christians around Bosnia, became more widespread during the nineteenth century.

The ongoing wars, the resulting militarization of the region, and the increased interest by foreign “Christian” powers in the fate of Ottoman Bosnia, coalesced to bring about an unprecedented conflation of class and confessional relations in eighteenth and nineteenth century Bosnia. These transformations led to growing tension between the Muslim landowning elite and the largely Christian raya. Located near the volatile northwestern border of the Ottoman Empire, social relations in the greater Kulen Vakuf region reflected these internal structural transformations brought on throughout Bosnia in response to the changing international context.

The rise in power of the kapetans and other Muslim provincial notables, and their strong tendency to abuse or disobey the laws of the central Ottoman authorities, was a direct result of these broader historical changes. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans began instituting a series of reforms in Bosnia in an attempt to break the power of local Bosnian Muslim elites, and, in 1835, decided to abolish the kapetanije. At the same time, they adopted a more conciliatory attitude to Christians in order to show other European powers that Bosnian Christians were protected under the law. By this point, however, the sense among the native Bosnian Muslim elite that they should be exempt from the regulations of the central Ottoman authorities, and yet maintain a dominant position over the Christian raya, was deeply entrenched. In 1840, a traveler from Croatia, while visiting Sarajevo, heard local Muslim notables discussing new taxes that the Ottoman Pasha was attempting to levy on them: “And why are we

taxed, as if we were Vlachs (a derogatory word for Orthodox Christians), and not Turks like him!?”58 Breaking the power of the Muslim provincial elite would eventually prove so difficult that the Ottomans decided to undertake a series of military offensives against them in the middle of the nineteenth century.59

During this time in Kulen Vakuf and its surrounding region, it appears that relations between Muslims and the mostly Orthodox Christian population were mixed. The town was populated predominately by Bosnian Muslims, some of whom were landowners and soldiers, and others, who were traders and merchants, out of the economic opportunity arising from the town’s location near the border with the Habsburg Monarchy.60 During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ottoman control had stretched across that border, and many of the ancestors of these Muslims had once lived on the other side in the region of Lika. As a result, many had maintained close ties, largely because of trading relations, with the Catholic and Orthodox populations in that area, which had come under Austrian control at the end of the eighteenth century.61 However, a number of these relationships were based not only on trade, but also on “blood-brotherhood” [probratimstvo].62 This was because some Muslims in Kulen Vakuf had long-standing family connections with Christians who lived in towns such as Udbina and Donji Lapac. These Christians had converted to Islam when the Ottomans

58 Matija Mažuranić, A Glance into Ottoman Bosnia or a Short Journey into that Land by a Native in 1839-1840 (London: Saqi, 2007 [1842]), 63.
60 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 3-6, 19-20; Krajina, „Kulen Vakuf,” 18 June 1964, 4.
62 Evans, Illyrian Letters, 51-52.
conquered the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When control was lost at the end of the seventeenth century, some of these Muslims left for Bosnia, while others stayed and converted back to Christianity. Family connections among them were often maintained, and some even continued to share the same last names, such as Osmanić and Abdulić, despite the changes in confession.\(^{63}\)

On the Ottoman side of the border, the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf lived in the Ljutoč valley, a narrow strip of land that stretched for nearly twenty-five kilometers to the north towards Mount Ljutoč, a sharply pointed peak that juts forth from the valley and towers over most everything else in sight. Three other Muslim villages—Klisa, Orašac, and Ćukovi—were established along the narrow valley floor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\(^{64}\) A number of the inhabitants of these villages, like their neighbors in Kulen Vakuf, were often landowners whose existence depended on collecting dues from their generally Orthodox Christian tenants who lived in villages in the hills and mountains surrounding the Ljutoč valley.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{64}\) On the history of Klisa and Orašac, which, like Kulen Vakuf, generally developed in response to nearby Ottoman military fortifications, see Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Kulen Vakuf* (Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija, 1935), 9-10.
2. The Ljutoč valley as seen from the Ostrovica fortress which sits above Kulen Vakuf. The peak in the center is Mt. Ljutoč. The Una River can be seen in the lower center, and the mosque in the center of the photograph is located in the Muslim village of Klisa. Photograph taken by the author on 7 October 2008.

During the last third of the nineteenth century, Muslim-Orthodox Christian relations in the region appear to have been marked by increasing tension. Sources on this subject are few, but the detailed account by Sir Arthur Evans, who visited the region on foot during 1877, is of use in attempting to sketch out some of the dynamics of inter-confessional relations. Like most foreign travelers who came to Bosnia during the second half of the nineteenth century, Evans was sympathetic to the subordinate position of the Christian peasant population, and his writings reflect this bias. One of his main interests was to document abuses committed by Muslim landowners and others against their non-Muslim tenants. As a result, his writings have a somewhat anti-Muslim tone to them, and do not contain much concrete information about Christian perceptions of
Muslim neighbors. Nonetheless, the reports he produced during 1877 for the *Manchester Guardian* provide one of the few “on-the-ground” windows into social relations in Kulen Vakuf region during the second half of the nineteenth century, and, when read critically, can be used to help construct a sketch of inter-confessional relations in that area.

Evans noted that some of the most influential and wealthy Muslim landowners in Kulen Vakuf, such as Tahir-beg Kulenović, held deeply negative views of the Orthodox Christian population, referring to those living in his area as “raya dogs.”65 However, this sentiment should not be taken as representative of the views of all Muslim elites in the region. The work of the Bosnian scholar Hamdija Kreševljaković, for example, suggests that other landlords, such as Alaj-beg Kulenović, did not hold such negative views of Orthodox Christians, and were in fact known for being well-liked by their tenants.66 Evans himself acknowledged the existence of a multiplicity of views among Muslims in the region when he discussed how a merchant he met in Kulen Vakuf despised the insults that landowners would heap on the Christian *raya*, especially on their religion.67

As for the views of Orthodox Christians, Evans noted that their perceptions of their Muslim landlords were formed not only by the ongoing economic exploitation they experienced in the present, but by stories passed down through the generations about the Ottoman conquest of the region. As he remembered hearing in an Orthodox Christian village: “In this village was an ancient graveyard, and an old cross over-thrown and half buried in the earth. The people said that when the Turks first conquered Bosnia a

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65 Ibid., 53.

66 Kreševljaković, *Kapetanije u Bosni i Hercegovini*, 186. See also, Bivanović, *Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena*, 34, for another example of a Muslim landlord named Muhamed Kulenović-Bajbutović (known as “Pašabeg”) who was apparently respected by his Orthodox Christian tenants because of “his fairness and understanding.”

marriage was going on here; that the Turks rushed in, killed the wedding guests and bridegroom, and carried off the bride, and this cross was set up in memory of the tragedy.”  

Whether such a story is true is less important than that it was told and retold among Orthodox Christians, thus making it “psychologically true,” as scholars of oral history have long observed about oral testimonies and stories. The existence of such tales obviously played a role in forming the historical consciousness of many Orthodox Christians in the region, and, at least for some, contributed to a negative perception of the “Turks,” who many often associated with their present-day Muslim landlords and neighbors.

More than age-old stories about the Ottoman conquest, it was the very real difficult economic conditions that the Christian peasantry faced on a day-to-day basis that fueled their resentment towards local Muslim landowners. In the Kulen Vakuf region, these difficulties manifested in at least one serious instance of confessional-national based violence in the 1870s, and an attempted massacre of Muslims immediately after the First World War. Mujo Demirović, a professor of law from the region, claims that in 1873 a handful of Orthodox Christians, including several from the Austrian side of the border, some of whom had begun to refer to themselves as “Serbs,” launched an attack on the Muslims of the Kulen Vakuf region. His evidence for this claim is somewhat

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68 Ibid., 30.


70 The adoption by Orthodox Christians in Bosnia of a sense of Serbian nationality was a complex process that was driven by nationalist activists, for the most part, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of this topic, but it needs to be stressed that a sense a sense of belonging to the “Serbian nation” [srpski narod] was not intrinsic to the Orthodox community in Bosnia; rather, it had to be cultivated through intensive work by nationalist activists. On the history of such activists in Bosnia, see Hajdarpašić, “Whose Bosnia?” On the origins of a specific sense of
dubious (he refers to a letter found in an Orthodox Church in the village of Nebljusi, but does not provide any citation so that others could examine the document). Demirović asserts that the Serbs murdered a number of Muslims in the Ljutoč valley, and attempted (or perhaps succeeded) to burn down a number of mosques. Exemplifying the difference of opinion among the Orthodox Christian population in regard to their Muslim landlords and neighbors, they also apparently set on fire at least forty homes of fellow Serbs who did not wish to join in their attack. If true, this 1873 incident marks the first recorded episode of violence in the region committed by Orthodox Serbs against Muslims (as well as against fellow Serbs).

Whatever the case, more reliable evidence exists, produced by travelers to the region and, later, by historians, that demonstrates the outbreak in 1875 of serious inter-confessional violence in the Kulen Vakuf region. By the summer of that year, the Ottoman authorities decided that the traditional tax of a tenth of a peasant’s produce would now need to be paid in cash, which was extremely difficult for most peasants to obtain. This set off an armed rebellion of Christians in the region of Herzegovina. By late summer, a number of Orthodox Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region, as well as throughout the Bosnian Krajina, had joined. Along the northwestern borderlands, Serb insurgents, supported and often led by Serb volunteers living on the Austrian side of the

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border, attacked Ottoman fortifications and set them on fire. They also sought out Muslim landlords and tax collectors, killing some, and destroying much of their property.\textsuperscript{73} According to Evans, who traveled with several insurgent commanders during 1877, the violence of the insurgents towards the “Turks” was brutal. When referring to one battle, a Serb insurgent commander emphasized how he had dealt with his Muslim opponents: “Why I cut them to pieces.”\textsuperscript{74} Other evidence, produced by insurgents, suggests that decapitation of “Turks” captured or killed in battles was common practice.\textsuperscript{75} It also appears that insurgents set fire to a number of Muslim villages, including some in the vicinity of Kulen Vakuf. This resulted in a sizable influx of refugees to the town.\textsuperscript{76}

As the violence escalated during the summer and autumn of 1875, thousands of Serb peasants fled from their villages to nearby mountains and caves, as well as to more secure locations across the border in Austria.\textsuperscript{77} In the Kulen Vakuf region, a large part of what drove many to leave was the violent Muslim response to the rebellion, and a general panic that massacres of the Christian population would soon be committed. With only a small number of Ottoman gendarmerie on hand to respond to the insurgents, local Muslim elites organized their own units of irregular troops, made up of local Muslims, known as the 	extit{bašibozuk} [bashi-bazouk]. Evans spoke with eyewitnesses about the

\textsuperscript{73} Čubrilović, \textit{Bosanski ustanak}, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{74} Evans, \textit{Illyrian Letters}, 21.

\textsuperscript{75} Bibanović cites the “Životopis” by Pero Kreco in which he describes cutting off the heads of “Turks” and sending them to the insurgent commander Golub Babić. See Bibanović, \textit{Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 26.

\textsuperscript{76} Evans, \textit{Illyrian Letters}, 98-99. It appears that many Muslim villagers took refuge in Kulen Vakuf after Serb insurgents set their villages on fire.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 3-4, 16. The total number of Christian refugees during this time throughout Bosnia remains difficult to determine, and is therefore disputed, but estimates range from 100,000 to nearly a quarter million. On such figures, see Malcom, \textit{Bosnia}, 301, note 56.
violence perpetrated by these soldiers. Regarding the Orthodox Christian monastery in Rmanj, located approximately fifteen kilometers from Kulen Vakuf, which was where the rebellion began in the region, he wrote:

The Turks, who paid it a visit in September 1875, have certainly done their worst. They have torn up the floor, smashed and overturned the sacred furniture, broken in the roof and parts of the wall, and riddled the whole inside with bullet holes. It was on September 15, 1875, that Tahir Beg Kulenović came here with a horde of 3,500 Bashi-Bazouks and burnt this and the neighboring villages of Great [Veliki] and Little [Mali] Cvjetnić, cutting down three old men, six women, and four children who had not escaped in time. The rest of the inhabitants took refuge on the mountain passes…

On May 14, however, of last year [1876] they were hunted out there by a gang of Bashi-bazouks from the direction of Kulen Vakuf, Bjelaj, and Petrovac, and twenty-four were massacred, in this case, as in the others, all of them old men, women, and children.78

While the number of 3,500 başıbozukṣ is undoubtedly a vast exaggeration, the description of the violence perpetrated by local Muslim units against the monastery in Rmanj and Serb villagers in Veliki and Mali Cvjetnić does not differ much from accounts written later by historians who made use of archival materials in researching the rebellion.79 It appears that the local elites who commanded these units, such as the landowner Tahir-Beg Kulenović from Kulen Vakuf, quickly transformed into local warlords, responsible to no one but themselves, as the region’s Ottoman bureaucracy and military, at least initially, proved too weak to deal with the insurgents.80

The result of this breakdown in authority was a spike in the amount of Muslim violence against local Serbs, which included not just murders, but also widespread stealing and the destruction of property. As Evans noted after having spoken with survivors of an attack on the Serbian village of Oćijevo:

78 Ibid., 39.
79 See, for example, Ekmeći, Ustanak u Bosni, 101, 121; Ćubrilović, Bosanski ustanak, 82.
80 Evans, Illyrian Letters, 53.
On Saturday, March 10 [1876?], a body of Bashi-bazouks, estimated by the villagers at about a hundred, under the leadership of Ali Beg Trovka, Mujo Beg Bibanović, and Ali Beg Kulenović (who, however, arrived late in the day), made their appearance in the lower village. They plundered the house and barn of David Karanović, seized all his corn, the clothing they found in the house, and, if his deposition to me is correct, took from him and his house-community 45 goats, about fifty sheep, 18 oxen and one horse. They robbed in the same way three other families. They then proceeded to the house of the village elder or Knez, the elected representative of the community, who receives a kind of official seal from the Turkish authorities. What follows I have from his wife. A Bashi-bazouk seized him on either side, while a third dispatched him with pistol shots. The Turks then made off with their booty to Kulen Vakuf, carrying with them in triumph the head of the village elder. A Christian in Kulen Vakuf saw the Turks kicking the head in the streets of the town.\

These instances of violence against the Orthodox peasantry were not supported by all of the Muslim elite of the region. For example, Evans noted that during this same attack “the women and girls [of the village of Očijevo] were stripped of the girdles and other ornaments that they possessed, and the irregulars were proceeding to outrages of a more shameful kind when stopped by the timely arrival of Ali Beg Kulenović (a landowner), who succeeded on this occasion in restraining his retainers.” Unfortunately, they returned the next day to Očijevo in greater numbers and, after searching for insurgents, proceeded to rape many of the women and girls who had not fled the village. The words of the survivors of a similar incident make clear the devastating impact of such violence: “Better it would have been that we had perished! If there had been fire we would have sprung into it, or if there had been water we would have drowned ourselves; but there was neither fire nor water.” Throughout the end of 1875, and during 1876, regular incidents of rape, murder (although, it appears, not on a

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81 Ibid., 77-78.
82 Ibid., 77.
83 Ibid., 78.
84 Ibid., 91.
mass scale), plunder, and the burning of Serbian villages by Muslim irregular soldiers continued in the Kulen Vakuf region.\(^{85}\)

And yet, as alluded to above, through the case of Ali Beg Kulenović and his intervention to stop the rape of the Serb women of Očijevo, there were local Muslims who opposed some or all of the violence against their non-Muslim neighbors. The merchant Mehmed Omić deplored the ongoing atrocities, but did not assign guilt to his Orthodox Christian neighbors for the violence. “We are ruined; trade is stopped; public security in abeyance; and who is to blame? First and foremost, the Begs [i.e., the Muslim landowners]. It is their savagery and their oppression of the rayah that has brought all this evil upon us.”\(^{86}\) Ali Beg Kulenović did more than just express his opposition to the violence. On at least one more occasion he apparently tried to persuade the local başibozuks to take a more moderate approach in their attacks on Serbian villages, but, in the end, failed in persuading other landowners to give such orders.\(^{87}\)

While the violence in the Kulen Vakuf region was a reflection of the general dynamics of the agrarian question, in which the conflation of class and confession had pitted Muslim landlords against the largely Orthodox Christian peasantry, the period 1875-1878 also witnessed a series of alliances that crossed, or at least attempted to cross, confessional lines. For example, it appears that a number of local Muslim notables managed to hold discussions with several insurgent commanders about ending the violence and coming to a more equitable solution over the agrarian question. In the end,

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 79-81, 85, 90-91.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 104.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 106.
however, their meetings amounted to nothing. This was due to the extreme elements in each camp who threatened these more moderate Muslims and Serbs. The reality of such threats was perhaps best illustrated by those Serb insurgents who set fire to the houses of Serb villagers who refused to participate in the rebellion. Among Muslims, it appears that the elites in control of the local başboziks were able to intimidate others who may have wished to pursue a non-violent approach to dealing with the rebellion of their Christian neighbors. A number of cross-confessional alliances continued despite the violence, such as the small number of Christians who continued living in Kulen Vakuf, and the handful of Muslim merchants who maintained trade relations with their Christian counterparts in the wider region. Throughout Bosnia, other cross-confessional alliances of a different sort emerged, such as the Serb merchants who chose to support the Ottoman authorities and local Muslim elites against the largely Serb peasant rebellion. These Serbs obtained part of their wealth by engaging in tax-farming, and thus were complicit with Muslim landowners in exploiting the largely Christian peasantry.

In the end, the rebellion lost direction and disintegrated, largely because of the inability of its Serb leadership, composed mostly of merchants, to unite behind common objectives. Those who engaged in tax-farming did not wish to expropriate the Muslim landowners, and therefore alienated the Christian peasantry. As a result, the position of

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88 Ibid., 118-119.
89 Ekmečić, Ustanak u Bosni, 120.
90 Evans, Illyrian Letters, 105.
91 Ibid., 93, 98-99.
92 Ekmečić, Ustanak u Bosni, 111.
the Muslim landowning elite remained structurally unchanged. In the Kulen Vakuf region, some Muslim elites apparently looked forward to exacting some kind of vengeance against their rebellious Christian tenants. As several landowners apparently remarked, when asked about the prospect of their tenants returning to their land: “Their lot will not be the same. We will not take more, but their lot will be worse.”

As the rebellion stagnated and then came to an end, Austria was granted the right in 1878 to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, a reward for agreeing to stay neutral in the Russo-Ottoman War, which had begun in 1877. The new Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia did not try to solve the agrarian question, but rather sought to maintain the existing land tenure system as established under the Ottoman Empire. As landownership laws remained the same, the social dominance of the Bosnian Muslim elite was preserved. This perpetuated agrarian tensions between Muslim landlords and Christian peasants, and laid the basis for future conflicts along confessional and national lines.

Although most Muslim elites in Kulen Vakuf opposed the occupation by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, it appears that almost no violence occurred in the immediate region in 1878 after the arrival of Austrian troops. According to a local history of the region, most residents remembered that the new foreign administrators simply imposed order and stability when it came to relations between Muslim landowners and the predominately Serb Orthodox peasantry, with each knowing they had to fulfill

93 Ibid., 100.

94 On the resentment of Muslim elites to the Austro-Hungarian occupation, see Ibid., 102, 110; Kamberović, Zemljišni posjedi u Bosni i Hercegovini, 400; on the overall absence of serious violence in response to the occupation of Kulen Vakuf, in which it seems that two Muslims were killed, see Kreševljaković, Kulen Vakuf, 24.
their obligations towards the other. While this did not change the structural basis for conflict between the two groups, the occupation does appear to have curbed the more extreme and widespread abuses, such as tax farming and violent methods of tax collection, which had triggered the rebellion in 1875.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the increased stability brought by Austro-Hungarian rule, it appears that for most of the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf, it was no longer their Serb Orthodox neighbors that posed the greatest threat to the continued existence of their way of life, but rather the natural world. The rushing waters of the Una could quickly become a menacing and destructive force, particularly in the fall and spring, when heavy rains would cause flooding. This wrought havoc in the town on a regular basis. As a defense, houses were often built on stilts so as to withstand the rapidly rising waters. But their wooden construction offered no defense against fire. The year 1775 was the first time that fire completely destroyed the town, and on 16 June 1903, flames once again consumed nearly every structure. During the years in between minor fires regularly caused significant damage. The dominance of nature over the town gave rise to a fatalistic saying among residents: “Fire will either burn or the Una will flood Vakuf.” In their powerlessness over the calamities brought on by the natural world, some even sought an explanation for contemporary political events. The Ostrovica River would on occasion dry up, and a number of people in Kulen Vakuf came to believe that this was a sign of impending political upheaval. After all,

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95 Bibanović, 

96 The 1903 fire destroyed ninety six houses as well as the entire market area (that is, the “čaršija”). The saying in Bosnian is as follows: “Vakuf će ili vatra zagorjeti ili Una poplaviti.”
many remembered that the river had dried up just before the Austrian occupation of 1878, and once again shortly before 1914.⁹⁷

The assassination in Sarajevo on 28 June of that year of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand by a young Serb revolutionary set off the First World War. In Bosnia, this act compelled the Austro-Hungarian authorities to institute a series of repressive measures against much of the Serb population, most especially in Sarajevo, but also in the eastern regions close to the border with Serbia and Montenegro. The Habsburg military authorities believed that Serb civilians, as well as guerrilla forces from Serbia and Bosnia, were preparing for war against the Empire. In response, the Empire’s army units took hostages whom they believed were involved in such activities and carried out a series of executions.⁹⁸ A number of Muslims and Catholic Croats were apparently recruited to join an auxiliary militia called the “Schutzkorps” to assist the Habsburg authorities in perpetrating repressive activities against Serbs, which included, not only hostage taking, but also stealing, demolition of property, and murders. Some evidence suggests that these units were not composed exclusively of Muslims and Croats; contemporary observers noted that some Serbs apparently also joined the militias and took part in the persecution of their co-nationals rather than be sent to the frontlines to fight for the Habsburg Monarchy. In any event, the context of war, long-term resentments against “the Turks” for exploitation suffered during the years of Ottoman

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⁹⁷ Kreševljaković, Kulen Vakuf, 3-4.

⁹⁸ On Habsburg perceptions of the Serb community in Bosnia in the aftermath of the June assassination, and methods of repression taken against it, see Jonathan Gumz, The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914-1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34-43. For a brief account of the persecution of Serbs in Bosnia, especially members of the intelligentsia and the political elite, in the wake of the Sarajevo assassination, see Vladimir Ćorović, Bosna i Hercegovina (Banja Luka: Glas srpski, 1999 [1940]), 235-236.
rule, and the violence of the “Schutzkorps,” eventually triggered Serb attacks on Muslims, with a sizable number of massacres taking place, especially in the eastern parts of Bosnia.\footnote{On the violence against Serbs that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first few years of the First World War, which some Muslims and Croats participated in, see Atif Purivatra, \textit{Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija u političkom životu Kraljevine Srb, Hrvata i Slovenaca} (Sarajevo: Bosanski kulturni centar, 1999 [1974]), 16-17, 47, footnote 124. On the debate over the ethnic composition of the “Schutzkorps,” see Ivo Banac, \textit{The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 367, note 18.} It is unclear if such killings and other crimes were perpetrated during the early years of the war in the Kulen Vakuf region. Whatever the case, the at least partly Muslim-Croat violence against Serbs during the First World War, and the subsequent Serb attacks on Muslims did not contribute to further harmonizing confessional and national relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the years 1914-1918.

As the war came to a close, locals in Kulen Vakuf remembered that the year 1918 was another instance in which the Ostrovica River dried up, and, as had been the case in 1878 and 1914, it was believed by many that some kind of upheaval would soon follow. They were not wrong. That year marked the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, commonly known as “The First Yugoslavia.” And with it came an attempt by local Serbs to carry out mass violence against the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf. On 26 November 1918, the Serbian-dominated government of the new state declared that agrarian reform would be instituted.\footnote{The main reason for the government’s decision to institute agrarian reform appears to have been fear that the revolutionary ideas emerging from post-1917 Russia would fuse with the already agitated mood of the peasantry and result in revolution. See Purivatra, \textit{Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija u političkom životu Kraljevine Srb, Hrvata i Slovenaca}, 32.} The essence of the reform was that the land would be redistributed to those who till it, and that former landowners would receive a “just indemnity.”\footnote{On the government’s decrees on agrarian reform, see Jozo Tomasevich, \textit{Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), 345-347.} In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the vast majority of the population—
close to ninety percent—was peasant and lived off the land. Given that landownership laws were created during the centuries of Ottoman rule, and had been preserved by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1878-1918), the question of agrarian reform was one of the most sensitive issues for both the population and political leadership of the new state. And because of the long-term entwinement of the agrarian question with class and confessional/national disputes, any attempt to alter the existing situation was bound to incite tension and conflict.

In the wake of the government’s decrees in late 1918 and early 1919 on agrarian reform, many Christian peasant tenants in Bosnia did not wait for the authorities to redistribute land; instead, they took matters into their own hands. Armed groups of so-called “Green Cadres” [zeleni kader], often made up of local Serb peasants, began to seize land from Muslims. They stole property, burned down houses and killed Muslims, both their former landlords and free peasants. In some cases, they destroyed entire Muslim villages. Some researchers have argued that as many as 2,000 Muslims were murdered in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1918 and 1921 by these groups of Serbs who often claimed that they were taking revenge on “the Turks.” Apparently, no one was brought to justice for these killings. As the historian Ivo Banac has argued, this anti-Muslim violence was only partly the result of class antagonisms. Serbs carried out

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102 On the chaos and violence against Muslims in the wake of the declaration for agrarian reform, see Atif Purivatra, “Političke partije prema agrarnoj reformi u Bosni i Hercegovini neposredno poslije 1918. godine,” in Atif Purivatra, Nacionalni i politički razvitak Muslimana. Rasprave i članici (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1969), 220-224, 226.

103 Šačir Filandra, Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću (Sarajevo: Setarija, 1998), 57; Safet Bandžović, Iseljavanje Bošnjaka u Tursku (Sarajevo: Institut za istraživanje zločina protiv čovječnosti i međunarodnog prava, 2006), 325; Kemal Hrelja, “Proizvodni odnosi u poljoprivredni Bosne i Hercegovini, 1918-1941,” in Kemal Hrelja and Atif Purivatra, Ekonomski genocid nad bosanskim muslimanim (Sarajevo: MAG—Udruženje Muslimana za antigenocidne aktivnosti, 1992), 46.
violent acts not merely against the relatively small numbers of Muslim landlords who possessed large estates, but against all Muslims, the vast majority of whom were smallholders. 104 This resulted in Muslim free peasants, who were often just as poor as former Serb tenants, choosing to align themselves with former Muslim landlords out of fear of Serb violence. 105 The killings of Muslims in the first years after 1918 thus appeared to contemporary observers less as the revenge of impoverished tenants against landlords; instead, it looked more like Serb revenge against “the Turks” for centuries of exploitation under the Ottomans, as well as perhaps for the repressive measures that some Muslims and Croats had participated in carrying out against Serbs in the aftermath of the Sarajevo assassination of 1914. 106

Some Serbs who lived in the hills and mountains around Ljutoč valley attempted to carry this wave of violence against the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf. Not long after the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, they marched to the town with the intention of slaughtering all its Muslim residents. However, they were stopped before anyone could be killed by the local Serbian Orthodox priest, Father Vukosav Milanović and a well-known Serb peasant from the nearby village of Palučak whose name was Jovan Knežević. 107 In another instance, the Serb tenants of the Muslim landowner Muhamed Kulenović-Bajbutović, who was known as “Pašabeg,” guarded him and his property day and night throughout the unstable period in the aftermath of the government’s decrees on agrarian reform. They were well aware that other Serbs wished


105 Purivatra, Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija u političkom životu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 33.

106 Ibid., 33-34, 39-40.

107 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 32.
to murder former Muslim landlords, and, because Pašabeg had always treated them fairly, they chose to protect him, and his property, from attacks that fellow Serbs sought to carry out. In such cases, a long-term tradition of friendship and good neighborly relations between some Serbs and Muslims in the region was strong enough to prevent more extreme elements from carrying out massacres of the Muslim population.

Although the mass violence was stopped before it could engulf Kulen Vakuf, agrarian reform nevertheless impoverished many of the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley. The government paid an inadequate amount of compensation to the Muslims whose land it redistributed to Serb peasants, and apparently none of the poorer Muslims in the region received any new parcels of land. It appears that more than a few families, who no longer received rents, and were not properly compensated for the lands they lost, were reduced to poverty because of the reforms. Throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the agrarian reforms, which affected about 4,000 families, constituted a huge transfer of economic power away from Muslims towards Serbs, who had composed the bulk of landless tenants. In the Kulen Vakuf region, this was almost certainly a contributing factor to a deep sense of bitterness among some Muslims towards their Serb neighbors. More so, it led to their rapid disillusionment and disappointment with the politics of the Serbian-dominated government.

Despite the economic hardships brought on by agrarian reform to the region’s Muslim population, Kulen Vakuf’s status as a trading center expanded after 1918. The

108 Ibid., 34.
109 Ibid., 34; Derviš Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen-Vakufu (Bihać: Kurtagić, 2005), 10-11.
110 Tomasevich, Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia, 345-355.
weekly Thursday market attracted merchants from as far away as Dalmatia on the Croatian coast. They were drawn to the town because of the exceptional diversity and quality of the livestock sold, which was produced, for the most part, in Serbian villages, as well as for other produce and crafts. The Thursday market was not only a place of haggling and bartering; it was also the central arena where Serbs and Muslims in the region interacted. During this period, as had always been the case, relations between them were mixed. Apparently some Serbs who brought pigs to town to be sold at the market would allow them to roam around near the Sultan Ahmed II mosque in the center of Kulen Vakuf. The town’s Muslims found this deeply offensive. The gendarmerie, which was composed overwhelmingly of Serbs, was said to have simply laughed at this sight, which only added to the tension. Other Serbs who came to the market would visit the town’s Orthodox Church which was located slightly outside the center on a hill near where water from the source of the Ostrovica River gushed out. Later, some would provocatively parade through Kulen Vakuf with Orthodox flags and crosses. Others, after selling their wares in the market, would spend hours drinking in the town’s taverns. This frequently resulted in drunkenness and fights, sometimes with local Muslims. All these behaviors had a negative effect on relations between Muslims and Serbs.

111 Bibanović, Svdjekočanstvo jednog vremena, 36.

112 Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen-Vakufu, 10. Not all fights that occurred under the influence of alcohol were related to tensions based on confession or nationality, even when such incidents occurred between individuals of different backgrounds. However, drunkenness was often a central feature in violent incidents between Serbs and Muslims in which chauvinistic sentiments by one (or both parties) were present. On the rise of such incidents during the 1930s throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in which Serbs were the main instigators, see Nusret Šehić, Četništvo u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1918-1941. Politička uloga i oblici djelatnost četničkih udruženja (Sarajevo: Akademija nauke i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 1971), 182.
At the same time, according to memoir accounts that make reference to the period, the market was a place of mixing between Serb and Muslim neighbors who liked one another. For them, the market was not only for buying and selling, but also a place to cultivate and maintain friendship. Serbs would sell their livestock, eggs, cheese and kajmak,113 and then spend hours talking with Muslim friends about all subjects, including politics. Later in the day on their way home, bouncing along the roads in their horse-drawn carts, these Serbs would sometimes argue and complain about the prices in the market for this or that, but it appears that rarely did they speak badly about the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf. Business in the market was one thing, but friendship and neighborliness were more important. For many Serbs and Muslims, the market was a central place where both could be cultivated and practiced.114

In addition to the market, the construction of railroad lines along the Ljutoč valley during the 1930s provided an opportunity for the growth of friendship across confessional and national lines. Many friendships were formed as men who prayed apart in churches and mosques cleared trees and pounded in spikes together while telling jokes. This experience deepened the connections among many of those involved by strengthening an existing tradition of mutual assistance between many local Serbs and Muslims.115 In economic terms, the building of the railroad did much to stimulate the growth of trading and crafts, as well as taverns in Kulen Vakuf. People whose land was needed for the

113 Kajmak is a traditional, home-made dairy product served in the Balkans. It is made by slowly boiling milk and simmering it for several hours. After cooling, the cream is skimmed off, chilled, and then eaten.


railroad lines were well compensated, and many others found work as laborers.\textsuperscript{116} Money, it was said at the time, was pouring out everywhere. This allowed a number of Muslims in town to build new houses, or to expand on what they already had, and many of those who had been engaged in trade finally had resources to renovate their stores.\textsuperscript{117}


Although the Thursday market and the construction of the railroad were the main engines of economic life in Kulen Vakuf during the 1930s, as well as two of the primary sites where Muslims and Serbs forged connections and friendships, political affiliation at the time was almost exclusively on a confessional-national basis. About ninety-five percent of the Muslims in town, and throughout the villages of the Ljutoč valley, were supporters of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization \textit{[Jugoslavenska muslimanska}

\textsuperscript{116} Bibanović, \textit{Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 36.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
organizacija], the main political party formed after 1918 for Muslims in Bosnia. The small number of Croats in nearby villages, such as Vrtočе and Kalati, as well as the handful that lived in Kulen Valuf, supported the Croat Peasant Party [Hrvatska seljačka stranka], which was the dominant political party for Croats through the country. And the vast majority of local Serbs in the region supported the National Radical Party [Narodna radikalna stranka], which was overwhelmingly Serb in membership and orientation. The Communist Party, which did not form in Kulen Vakuf until 1940, had a very small membership of Muslims from the town and a handful of Serbs from nearby villages.118

This stark political division of the Muslims, Serbs and Croats of the region according to confession and nationality did not mean that hatred and antagonism among people were dominant in everyday affairs during the 1920s and 1930s. Other than the Communist Party, which had been banned in 1921, only to be legalized again in 1940, no real multi-national political parties existed in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and, after the establishment of dictatorship in 1929, the renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In a country where the national question had become “the question of all questions” among nearly all of the political elite, it was logical that parties claiming to speak for their “nations” would be the main choices available to the masses. But for many people, serious differences of opinion over politics did not radically affect everyday interactions among neighbors. In Kulen Vakuf, Muslims and Serbs would sometimes argue in the Thursday market or in taverns about the latest political news from Belgrade, but a few

118 Ibid., 39. For the most comprehensive study of the complex political landscape of interwar Yugoslavia, particularly during period 1918-1921, see Banac, The National Question in Yugoslavia. On the history of the National Radical Party, see idem., 153-169; on the Croat Peasant Party, see Mark Biondich, Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904-1928 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); on the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, see Purivatra, Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija u političkom životu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca.
days later many could be seen walking together to the local soccer field. There they drank and joked together while watching teams like *Mladost* [Youth] and *Una* (named after the river running through town) face off against each other, with Muslims and Serbs playing together on both teams. In some cases, the friendships between Serbs and Muslims were so deep that they became *kumovi* [godfathers] to each other through marriage, one of the clearest indicators in Bosnia of deep friendship. It appears that only on rare occasions, such as when a Muslim walked into a tavern in the late 1930s and fired five bullets into a photograph of the Serb king of Yugoslavia that was hanging on the wall, would individuals with more extreme political views make their presence felt to the rest of the community.

4. The Muslim and Serb members and management of the soccer team *Mladost* in Kulen Vakuf posing together for a photograph in 1937. Standing from left to right are Bogdan Došenović, Muharem

119 Ibid., 38-39.

120 Interview with Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

Tensions and hatreds did exist among some Muslims, Serbs, and the small number of Croats in the Kulen Vakuf region during the years immediately before the Second World War. A main cause was the long-term dispute over the region’s agrarian question. Due to the Ottoman Empire’s pattern of conquest and landownership laws, and the specific historical transformations in the region between the end of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, namely, the ongoing wars, the militarization of the western borderlands, and resulting conflation of class and confession, there emerged a dramatic rise in tension between Muslim landowners and their predominately Serb-Orthodox tenants. While curbing the more extreme abuses and enforcing the rule of law, the Austro-Hungarian authorities nevertheless preserved the structural origins of this tension during the years 1878-1918. The decision of the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom to redistribute land mostly to former Serb tenants, but without properly compensating former Muslim landowners, which resulted in deep bitterness among the latter against the former, ensured that the agrarian question would continue to remain deeply entwined with, and negatively affect, confessional and national relations. The conflation of class and confessional-national conflict may have also manifested in tensions and resentments between town and village, as the merchants of Kulen Vakuf were almost exclusively Muslims, while the rural population was predominately Serb, with a minority of Croats.

Prior to the Second World War, there were two main instances of serious inter-confessional-national violence, and attempted violence, which had roots in these structural tensions related to the agrarian question. The rebellion of 1875-1878 by largely
Orthodox Christian tenants against their Muslim landlords resulted in violence being committed by both sides. In the Kulen Vakuf region, the response by a number of Muslim landlords, who organized groups of irregular soldiers, was especially brutal, and included not only attacks on Serb-Orthodox insurgents, but also rapes, the murder of unarmed civilians, the burning of villages, and widespread plunder. Yet the evidence suggests that the Muslim population was not united in supporting this violence, and neither was Orthodox community. Moderates appear to have existed on both sides who, while often silenced by more extreme elements, nonetheless sought to avoid violent confrontation and to resolve the disputes through peaceful means.

In the aftermath of the decrees on agrarian reform after 1918, a second instance of attempted violence occurred, in which Serb peasants sought to massacre the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf. Yet it was outside events—the creation on the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and upheaval caused by the declaration of agrarian reform—that triggered this attempt to engage in mass violence. Of equal importance, it was local Serbs who came to the aid of their Muslim neighbors and stopped other Serbs from carrying out the massacre. The motivation of at least some of those who intervened to stop these attempted massacres appears to have been rooted in a tradition of fair treatment and respect that existed between some former Serb tenants and Muslim landlords. In this case, local traditions of cooperation and friendship across confessional-national lines were sufficiently strong to repel and contain the local destructive forces unleashed by outside political events.

On the eve of the Second World War’s arrival to Yugoslavia in April 1941, extreme confessional-national polarization in everyday affairs does not appear to have
been the order of the day in the Kulen Vakuf region. Tensions did exist for some along these lines, and people were certainly conscious of differences in their religious practice and, for some, national identity. But the evidence does not suggest that long-term conflicts, such as that over the region’s agrarian question, made some sort of locally-driven mass violence likely to explode in 1941. The interwar Yugoslav kingdom was plagued with political instability and serious conflict, but in the localities, like the Kulen Vakuf region, tension and disintegrative forces co-existed with traditions of friendship and cooperation. The words written by Arthur Evans in 1877 were equally applicable in 1941: “To-day, in this unhappy land, look where we will, we see nothing but divisions—barriers political, social, and religious. But whenever we go back a step…whenever we turn our gaze, our search reveals the still existing bonds of union…”

The German invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941 would provide a massive shockwave from the outside that would destabilize this delicate internal order in Bosnia and Herzegovina and unexpectedly empower a small number of extremists. It was this historical accident—not widespread hatred among neighbors of different religions and nationalities—that would soon trigger the outbreak of a level of unprecedented local violence in the Kulen Vakuf region.

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122 Evans, Illyrian Letters, 130.
Chapter Two

The Second World War

I. The Ustashas and the Mass Killing of Serbs

On 6 April 1941 the Germans invaded Yugoslavia and quickly defeated the ill-prepared Yugoslav army. They then proceeded to dismember the country. While much of the territory was divided up among the Axis powers, most of Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated into a new state called the Independent State of Croatia [Nezavisna Država Hrvatska], or commonly known by its acronym as “the NDH.” Its fascist leadership, known as the Ustashas [Ustaše or “the Insurgents”], under the command of the Croat right-wing extremist Ante Pavelić, were committed to creating a state for Croats, and for them alone. Before the war, the Ustashas had been a fringe terrorist organization which violently opposed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Most of its membership lived in exile abroad. In April 1941, the Ustashas had only 2,000-4,000 members and an unknown number of sympathizers.  

123 But when mainstream Croat political leaders declined Hitler’s invitation to lead the NDH, the Ustashas stepped in and found themselves unexpectedly in control of a large territory composed of fellow Croats, Muslims and Serbs, as well as Jews and Roma. As for the many Muslims who found themselves as citizens of the new state, the Ustashas considered them to be Croats of the Islamic faith (i.e., as Croat Catholics who had converted to Islam during the period of Ottoman rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina), and welcomed them into the new homeland for “the Croatian nation.” By classifying Muslims in this way, and allowing them to retain their

religious and cultural institutions, the Ustashas were able to claim that over fifty percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s population was Croat.\footnote{Dulić, \textit{Utopias of Nation}, 85-86.} Aside from Jews and Roma, the main population that stood in the way of the Ustashas’ vision of an ethnically-pure Croatian state was the Serbs who composed nearly one-third of the population of the NDH.\footnote{The population of the NDH was approximately six million. Just over half were Croat Catholics. The rest included 1.9 million Orthodox Serbs, about 500,000 Muslims, 140,000 ethnic Germans, 70,000 Hungarians, 40,000 Jews, and 150,000 “others” (e.g., Roma). On these statistics, see Ibid., 79.}

Unlike Jews and Roma, it appears that the Ustashas did not seek to exclude Serbs from the NDH on racial grounds. Rather, they viewed Serbs as a culturally distinct group that was inferior and alien, and that posed a threat to the Croatian nation. As such, plans to remove the Serb population were not immediately centered on its physical annihilation, unlike the Ustashas’ position on the fate of its Jewish and Roma populations for which extermination was the only possible option. Deportation out of the NDH and religious conversion were two solutions that Ustasha officials considered as potential methods for dealing with the Serbs. Towards these ends, Ustasha officials began by preparing laws for forced conversions, the expropriation of assets and the dismissal of Serbs from public offices, and the banning of aspects of Serbian culture, such as Orthodox churches and the Cyrillic alphabet.\footnote{Ibid., 67. Other works consulted on the origins, ideology, and early policies of the Ustashas include Jelić-Butić, \textit{Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941-1945}; Bogdan Krizman, \textit{Ante Pavelić i Ustaše} (Zagreb: Globus, 1978); idem. \textit{Ustaše i Treći Reich} (Zagreb: Globus, 1983); Tomasevich, \textit{War and Revolution in Yugoslavia}.}

The administrative center of the NDH government in northwestern Bosnia was the city of Bihać, located fifty-six kilometers north of Kulen Vakuf on the Una River. Like other regional centers of the new regime, it was in Bihać that local Ustahas began...
to draw up plans to remove the non-Croat populations from the NDH. While many Croats and Muslims in the region were not supportive of the Ustasha’s desire to create a state only for Croats, others decided to join the new regime out of ideological conviction, resentments against their non-Croat neighbors, pursuit of personal enrichment, or some combination of the three.\textsuperscript{127} It was in Bihać during April 1941 that the Ustasha launched their program to cleanse northwestern Bosnia of Serbs, Jews and Roma. The Ustasha Ljubomir Kvaternik came to the city shortly after the creation of the NDH and gave a public speech in which he stressed the importance of “the brotherhood and unity of Muslims and Catholics (Croats)” and declared “that there is no place in this country for Serbs and Jews.”\textsuperscript{128} Shortly thereafter, the local Ustasas issued decrees that placed Serbs and Jews outside the protection of the law and limited their movements. On 17 April 1941, they began arresting prominent Serbs. By the middle of June, they expanded the persecution and carried out mass arrests of all male Serbs in the Bihać region.\textsuperscript{129} Then the following decree was issued: “Vlachs (a derogatory terms for Serbs) and Jews, to safeguard the Croatian character of the Croatian city of Bihać, you are not allowed to be within 15 kilometers of the city.”\textsuperscript{130} During the second half of June 1941, the Ustahsas began to demolish Serbian Orthodox churches in the region, and those they left


\textsuperscript{128} Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond 110, Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača (DKUZ), kut. 493, dos. br. 4942, Zapsnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 21 September 1945, 1.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., dos. br. 4942, Zapsnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 7 August 1946, 2-3; Milan Vukmanović, \textit{Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine} (Banjaluka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1987), 103-105, 108.

\textsuperscript{130} AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 493, dos. br. 4942, Zapsnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 7 August 1946, 9.
standing were used as temporary jails for the Serbs who they arrested. 131 The main desired result of these policies was to induce the region’s sizable Serb population to flee from the NDH. However, despite these ominous developments, and the growing atmosphere of fear and terror, many Serbs, as well as Jews, in the Bihać region simply could not believe that their lives were in danger. The absence of a long history of widespread ethnic violence in the region made it difficult to imagine that the Ustaschas would physically harm them. 132

5. The city of Bihać on the Una River. Photograph taken by the author on 6 December 2008.

131 Ibid., Zapsinik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 21 September 1945, 1; Ibid., kut. 493, dos. broj. 4944, Zapisnik sastavljen pred Zemaljskom komisijom za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača u Bihaću srez Bihać okrug Bihać, Ćurić Živko, 3 February 1945, 1.

132 Vukmanović, Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine, 108.
In Kulen Vakuf, a Croat by the name of Miroslav ("Miro") Matijević was selected to organize Ustasha units in the town, throughout the Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley, and in the neighboring Croatian villages. Matijević was born in the Croatian village of Vrtoče, located in the hills northeast of Kulen Vakuf, but had moved his wife and children to town several years before the war. He ran a tavern around a kilometer outside of the center at a spot on the Una River called the Buk [the waterfall], a place where the river bottlenecks, causing the water to rush furiously through a small gorge. Matijević took power on 15 April 1941 and, at first, nothing seemed to change. There were no incidents of violence, no arrests, no one took revenge for any past wrongs, and there were no problems between anyone on the basis of nationality. On the contrary, Serbs and Muslims and Croats in the region continued to meet peacefully every Thursday at the market, and they attended dances and played soccer together, just as they had before the war.\footnote{Bibanović, \textit{Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 43.}
6. The *Buk* in Kulen Vafuk as depicted in a postcard from 1906. The house and tavern of the Ustasha Miroslav Matijević was located on either the left or right side of the Una River. Source: Huseinović i Babić, *Svjetlost Evrope u Bosni i Hercegovini*, 406.

But between mid April and May, Matijević was quietly assembling Ustasha units in town and in all of the nearby Muslim and Croatian villages. According to Esad Bibanović, one of the few members of the Communist Party in Kulen Vakuf in 1941, and a long-time researcher of the wartime history of the region, Matijević found six volunteers in Kulen Vakuf, one of whom was Croat and the rest Muslims. In the nearby Croatian village of Kalati, he found six Croats. In Orašac, he found five, and another five in Ćukovi—all Muslims. He gave them Ustasha uniforms and weapons; another ten men he enlisted to help, but gave no uniforms to them. However, documents in the Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Archive of Yugoslavia suggest that many others joined the Ustashas. Instead of the thirty two individuals cited by Bibanović, fifty one

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134 Ibid., 43-44.
names appear in various archival documents, of which thirty two were Muslims and nineteen Croats. In 1941, the population of Kulen Vakuf was around 2,100, of which 1,975 were Muslims. In the rest of the Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley (i.e., Klisa, Orašac and Ćukovi) the total number residents was around 3,700. To these 5,675 Muslims should be added around 500 or so Croats who lived in the nearby villages of Kalati and Vrtoče, which were the main villages where Matijević found men ready to join the Ustaschas. As a way of illustrating the limited popularity of the Ustaschas in the Kulen

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135 It is likely that this number was even higher, as no names of men from the village of Ćukovi appear in the documents, and only a few from Klisa. What follows below is the first list ever compiled of men in the Kulen Vakuf region who were believed to have been Ustaschas. In addition to Miroslav Matijević, the following men from Kulen Vakuf, as well as from the Muslim and Croatian villages located in and nearby the Ljutoč valley, are thought to have joined the Ustaschas: Avdo Buržić (Kulen Vakuf), Bego Kadić (Kulen Vakuf), Huća Zelić (Kulen Vakuf), Meho Mušeta (Kulen Vakuf), Mustajbeg Kulenović (Kulen Vakuf?), Reuf Kurtagić (Kulen Vakuf), Hilmija Altić (Kulen Vakuf), Mumaga Mehadžić (Kulen Vakuf), Mahmut Kulenović (Kulen Vakuf), Ibrahim Pehlivanović (Kulen Vakuf), Muho Bibanović (Kulen Vakuf), Muho Islamagić (Kulen Vakuf), Agan Kozlica (Orašac), Alago Rusadžić (Orašac?), Mujo Sušnjar-Vukalić (Orašac), Adem Kulenović (Orašac), Esad Hukić (Orašac), Ramo Glumac (Orašac), Osman Glumac (Orašac), Redžo Hadžić (Orašac), Ibrahim Vojić (Orašac), Behram Džafica, (Orašac), Alija Bašić (Orašac?), Meho Mešić (Orašac?), Ahmet Ramula Bećin (Orašac?), Husein Mešić (Orašac), Lalo? Štrkljević (Klisa or Kulen Vakuf), Hasan Saračević (Klisa?), Suljo Pehlivanović (Ostrovia), Naš Hrnjić (Ostrovia), Smajo Đžigumović (village of origin unknown), Nikola Buženja (Vrtoče), Ivan Buženja (Vrtoče), Božo Buženja (Vrtoče), Mile Marić (Vrtoče), Vid Marić (Vrtoče), Božo Marić (Vrtoče), Dane Marić (Vrtoče), Perica Marić (Vrtoče), Mile Marić (Vrtoče), Joso Šikić (Kalati), Mile Pavić (Kalati), Marko Hodak (Kalati), Juro Ivanšić (Kalati), Ivan Pavelić (Kalati), Ivan Ivezić (Kalati), Aćo Ivez (Kalati), Blaž Babić (Kalati), Jošo Šikić (Kalati), Marko Pavić (Kalati). This list of names was compiled by examining the following documents in the Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Archive of Yugoslavia: AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Buržić, Avde, 27 May 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Bege, 23 September 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić, 12 October 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović, 26 August 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić, 15 October 1946; AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. broj. 5361, Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtoče, 31 July 1946; Ibid., Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946; Ibid., kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946.
Vakuf region, one need only observe that the fifty-one volunteers who joined Matijević made up less than one percent of the total population of Muslims and Croats.

Little is known about Miroslav Matijević. This is no documentation from the pre-war period which characterizes him as having a special kind of pathological hatred for Serbs. It is thus difficult to determine why he was selected and what compelled him to become the leader of the Ustashas in the Kulen Vakuf region. As for the rest of the men who joined him, even less is known. The youngest among them was a teenager, while the oldest was forty-nine years old. Many of the Croats who joined came from the same extended families. The existing documentation does not suggest that the men who joined the Ustashas in the Kulen Vakuf region had been extreme nationalists in the years leading up to 1941.136 Like many of the other perpetrators of mass violence in Europe during the Second World War, such as the German reserve policemen described by the historian Christopher Browning, they appear to have been “ordinary men” up until the time when the opportunity presented itself to become Ustashas.137 They may have volunteered less out of an ideological commitment to purifying the NDH of all non-Croat elements, and more because of the unique opportunity to profit from the persecution of their Serb neighbors and, for some, to settle once and for all any ongoing personal disputes. In other instances of war or extreme social upheaval, neighbors who had nursed personal grievances against one another, but who had previously lived in peace during more stable

136 An exception appears to have been the new mayor of Kulen Vakuf, Huća Zelić, a Muslim who was known for having publicly declared his support for Hitler and the Nazi regime. See Esad Bibanović, “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” in Bihać u novijoj istoriji (1918-1945) Tom I. (Banjaluka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1987), 430.

times, seized on the opportunity to rapidly “privatize politics” in order to realize personal objectives that would have been otherwise unobtainable. A similar dynamic may have been at work in the Kulen Vakuf region when it came to those Croats and Muslims who joined the Ustashas.

Because of the paucity of existing archival documentation, their precise personal motivations, their specific pre-war experiences with Serbs in the region, in short, the concrete reasons that led them to become Ustashas remain difficult to precisely determine. Did the Muslim Ustashas wish to exact revenge on the Serbs of the region because of the lands they lost as a result of the agrarian reform of 1918? Historian Tomislav Dulić has found some evidence that economic grievances rooted in the land that was redistributed from Muslims to Serbs was a strong motivating factor among those who joined the Ustashas in parts of Herzegovina. This may have also played a role in the Kulen Vakuf region. Were the Croats angry about what they perceived as the anti-Croatian politics of the Serbian-dominated government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia? This was most likely the case among some of the local Croats who joined the Ustashas. Nonetheless, there is very little hard evidence with which to answer these sorts of questions. A great weakness of the historiography on the Ustasha Movement, and of the available archival documentation, is that very little information exists on the origins, motivations, and worldviews of its rank


139 Dulić, Utopias of Nation, 134, 143.
and file members. This same problem hinders any attempt to research the motives of the Ustasha of the Kulen Vakuf region. What is known is that there had always been a small number of extremists in the area among all nationalities who hated others for various reasons, some of which were related to politics and long-term disputes with a connection to confessional and national difference, and some of which were related to personal conflicts which also sometimes were rooted along these lines. But these individuals appear not to have been a majority of the population. The low numbers of men willing to join the Ustasha reflected the long-standing tradition in the region of friendship and mutual assistance regardless of one’s confession and nationality. For many Muslims and Croats, the Ustasha’s ideology of national hatred ran counter to their positive daily experiences with their Serb neighbors.

Nonetheless, the arrival of the war to Bosnia through the German invasion of Yugoslavia, which produced a sudden and radical change in government, created an unprecedented and exceptionally fertile environment for mass violence. The commitment of the NDH’s leadership to removing non-Croats from the new state provided Croats and Muslims with an extraordinary opportunity to profit from the persecution of their non-Croat neighbors. The ongoing tensions along national lines because of unsolved agrarian and national questions, and the existence of personal disputes and the desire for enrichment, which also often crossed national lines, must have been among the motivating factors driving the small number of Croats and Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region to join the Ustasha. However, without the German invasion and

140 For example, Dulić laments that it is very difficult, with the available evidence, to explain what led most individuals to join the Ustasha. He speculates about “personal gain,” “local grievances,” “peer pressure,” “the deteriorating security situation,” as well as “the dynamics of conflict,” but his argumentation remains essentially speculative, and lacks evidence. See Ibid., 349, 351.
the subsequent destruction of the old order, and its replacement by a new regime committed to purging non-Croats from the NDH’s population, it is unlikely that these men would have taken the decision to join the extremist Ustahas. The war, which the Germans brought to Bosnia, created a unique situation for these individuals to involve themselves in politics in ways they might never have without the German invasion.

The apparent calm in Kulen Vakuf would soon be shattered by policies which the Ustahas in Bihać set in motion during the second half of June 1941. Ideas about rapidly converting the Serb population to Catholicism or quickly expelling large numbers of Serbs outside the borders of the NDH were proving difficult to realize in the context of the broader war. While the presence of the German army in northwestern Bosnia was minimal during the early summer of 1941, and thus military actions were practically non-existent, it was nevertheless logistically unfeasible to begin deporting the region’s large Serb population to Serbia where the Germans, along with local Serb collaborators, had become the occupying power. The occupying authorities there were simply not equipped for the rapid transfer of thousands of Serb refugees. The Ustahas thus looked to the heartland of their new state and saw large numbers of Serbs whom they considered as a potential threat. In this way, their situation can be compared to that of the Ottoman administrators in 1915 who, in the context of the First World War, viewed their large Armenian population in the same way. And so, by mid June, the Ustahas in

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142 Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, 334.
northwestern Bosnia took the decision to use mass violence to both physically eliminate part of the Serb population and induce the rest to flee.\footnote{Employing mass violence to both physically eliminate part of a given population and compel others to flee is a central point in Michael Mann, \textit{The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).}

On the night of 17 June 1941, they began the mass killing of the Serb men whom they had arrested during the previous weeks and months. Groups of Serbs were loaded onto trucks and taken a few kilometers outside of the city to a place called Garavice, an area of rolling hills filled with ravines and canals. There the Ustashas emptied the trucks of their prisoners and tied their hands behind their backs with wire. They then machine-gunned the Serbs down. The explicitly nationalist basis of the killings was best exemplified when one of the Serb prisoners yelled out in anguish to an Ustasha: “Why are you killing us!?” The Ustasha simply answered: “Because you are Serbs.”\footnote{AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 493, dos. br. 4944, Zapisnik sastavljen pred Zemaljskom komisijom za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača u Bihaću srez Bihać okrug Bihać, Ćurić Živko, 3 February 1945, 2.}

A number of local Muslims and Croats had been ordered to the site to help dig mass graves for the victims. Under threat of repercussions, they were forced to help dump the bodies into the freshly dug holes. Trucks brought new groups of victims constantly throughout the night, and the scenario was repeated most nights until the second half of July. It was then that the intensity of the killings increased, reaching a crescendo between 23-29 July. So many Serbs were killed in such a short period of time that the shallow mass graves could not conceal the bodies. The massive quantity of blood from the victims seeped into nearby streams and began to contaminate the local water supply. In the summer heat the stench from the rotting corpses was overpowering. The
Ustasha authorities were eventually forced to create a special sanitation commission to deal with the site and the threat of an epidemic which it posed. The precise number of Serbs killed at Garavice is still disputed to this day, but the number is thought to be in the thousands.\textsuperscript{145}

While exceptionally gruesome, it is debatable whether these initial mass killings constituted genocide. The term is usually defined as acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.\textsuperscript{146} In one sense, the large number of Serbs whom the Ustashas murdered at Garavice during June and July 1941 appears to fit this definition. The intent to physically annihilate a substantial number of Serbs certainly appears to have existed among the Ustasha leadership in the region. However, at this stage the Ustasha killings were perpetrated, for the most, only against Serb men. For the genocide of the Serb population to have occurred, women and children would have eventually been exterminated at the site, yet they were not. Moreover, at least theoretically speaking, deportation out the borders of the NDH and conversion from Orthodoxy to Catholicism were still options the Ustashas kept open, and, in certain areas, endeavored to realize, even while the mass killings were taking

\textsuperscript{145} On the mass killings at Garavice, see in Ibid., kut. 493, dos. br. 4942, Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 7 August 1946, 1-17; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 18 September 1945, 1; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 28 September 1945, 1-2; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 21 September 1945, 1. See also, Vukmanović, Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine, 116-121. In terms of the number of victims murdered at the site, no precise figure exists. Shortly after the war, 12,000 victims were believed to have been murdered at Garavice. However, no evidence exists to support this claim. A report compiled by the organization of Partisan veterans in the municipality of Bihać in 1983 appears to offer the most precise count: 2,926, the majority of whom were of Serbian nationality. However, this figure apparently does not include victims from municipalities other than Bihać who were brought to Garavice in 1941 and murdered there. The real number, therefore, is most likely several thousand higher, but far short of 12,000. See ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bihać, Predmet: Izvještaj po aktu pov. 05-7/83, 27 September 1983, 1-2.

place. It appears that the killings may have been part of a plan to induce the remaining Serbs to flee from the territory of the NDH, rather than an overt attempt to physically annihilate the entire Serb population. For these reasons, the term mass killing, which is generally defined as the large-scale, intentional killing of noncombatants but not necessarily with the intent of achieving the total physical extermination of a given group—rather than genocide—may be more appropriate to use when discussing the violence perpetrated against Serbs at Garavice by the Ustashas during the summer of 1941.147

In Kulen Vakuf, the Ustasha leader Matijević knew that nearly all the residents would be opposed to similar mass violence against Serbs in the region. So he ordered his men to begin their attacks in secret. In small groups during the end June and the first days of July 1941 the Ustashas entered Serbian villages to the west of Kulen Vakuf and embarked on what would quickly become a sustained period of mass killing. Matijević began by having five prominent Serbs from nearby villages arrested. Then, in front of his men, he apparently killed all five with his bare hands to demonstrate how to kill without mercy. During the coming days the Ustashas continued arresting prominent Serb men, including school teachers, former members of the gendarmerie, merchants, and the heads of leading families. None of them ever returned to their villages and none of their bodies were ever found.148 They ordered other Serbs, under threat of severe consequences, to bring certain quantities of money to Kulen Vakuf, which suggests that the pursuit of

147 For a discussion on the distinctions between the terms “mass killing” and “genocide,” and the analytical strengths and weaknesses of each, see Benjamin Valentino, Final Solutions. Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 9-29.

148 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 44. Some argue that the clandestine violence against Serbs started as early as late May and then increased in frequency during June 1941. See, for example, Milan Majstorović, “Kulen Vakuf opština u NOR-u,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOR. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga III (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 376.
material gain was an important motivating factor among the region’s Ustashas. The Serbs who did not were led away in the direction of the Croatian town of Donji Lapac and killed. More than one hundred suffered this fate.\textsuperscript{149} The Ustashas arrested many more and led them back to Kulen Vakuf. Usually they held them in the town’s primary school for a night or two. Then the Ustashas would lead them up the hill to the Orthodox Church and slit their throats, later dumping their bodies in a nearby ditch. The precise number of dead is not known, but it appears that at least 100-150 were murdered in this way.\textsuperscript{150} The absence of a history of mass ethnic violence in the region contributed to the ease with which the Ustashas arrested and murdered the male Serb elite. Most Serbs felt they had nothing to fear when the Ustashas came to arrest them, as they had not broken any laws and did not believe that their Croat and Muslim neighbors would physically harm them. The Croat and Muslim Ustashas capitalized on this dynamic and used the opportunity to rob and kill their Serb neighbors.

This initial phase of the killing unfolded in a similar manner as other instances of mass violence in which scholars have noted that perpetrators begin by murdering the male elite of a group in order to disorient the remaining members by depriving them of their leaders. It appears that at this point the killings were not intended to completely annihilate the entire Serb population but rather to induce the remaining Serbs to flee. Yet, by around mid July, as this tactic proved increasingly unfeasible, the Ustashas increased the intensity of the violence and began to slowly target Serb women and children. For example, on 12 July 1941, a group of Ustashas attacked the Serbian village

\textsuperscript{149} AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946, 1-5.
of Bubanj, located southwest of Kulen Vakuf. They drove out the villagers, set their houses on fire, and killed as many as they could, including eleven teenage girls who had been harvesting corn in nearby fields.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 817, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946, 1.} As these killings began to include all members of the Serbian community—both men and women—they increasingly took on a genocidal dimension.

Exemplifying the tradition of inter-ethnic friendship in the region, a number of the Muslims and Croats living in the Ljutoč valley found out about these attacks, arrests, and killings almost as soon as they happened and quickly took steps to warn their Serb neighbors to flee. Ahmet Pehlivanović, who lived behind the old Ottoman fortress on the ridge above Kulen Vakuf in the village of Ostrovica, traveled on several occasions to Kalati to warn the Serbs there about the Ustashas. Ivan Đukulović, a Croat from the same village, was constantly warning his Serb neighbors about the dangers they faced, and once even ran ahead of a group of Ustashas to warn the Serbs to flee. Those who listened to him survived, while the rest were murdered. The Serb Sveto Zorić recalled how a Muslim from the village of Orašac came to his village and warned him that the Ustashas were planning to arrest and murder all of the men. Thanks to this man, 150 lives were saved. Some even tried to intervene while the attacks were underway. Ibrahim Vojić approached a group of Ustashas who were in the midst of killing Serbs, and asked desperately: “Why are you killing these healthy people?!” They replied: “If it’s not clear to you then we’ll kill you too!” And then they executed this Muslim who had tried to come to the aid of his Serb neighbors. In spite of the great danger they faced, Muslims and Croats in the region managed to save a significant number of their Serb
neighbors during the early phases of the mass arrests and killings which Matijević and his Ustasha carried out. In Kulen Vakuf alone, Muslims saved fifty nine of the 106 Serb residents of the town. Such acts indicate that the Muslim and Croat populations of the Ljutoč valley were far from united when it came to how to treat their Serb neighbors in the aftermath of the German invasion and the establishment of the NDH regime. A small number chose to become Ustashas and carried out acts of mass violence against Serbs; yet others were revolted by the killings and risked their lives to save their Orthodox neighbors. This split among the non-Serb population in the Ljutoč valley suggests that the NDH leadership operated with limited popular support which, in certain instances, constrained their ability to perpetrate mass violence.

Aware of the efforts that some Muslims and Croats were taking to save Serbs, the Ustashas changed tactics accordingly. As a way of concealing future killings, Matijević ordered that Serbs who were arrested were to be marched eight kilometers west of town towards the Croatian village of Boričevac. Around a kilometer outside the village, his men cleared a fifty-meter long path off the side of the road through the forest. This led to a spot that most people in the region had never heard of. At the end of the path was a hole in the ground which was the opening of a deep pit. It was so dark and unknown that the few individuals aware of its existence attributed mystical qualities to it. They believed that it had no bottom, or that fearsome animals lived deep within it, or that its bottom was a vast lake. Especially from the middle of July 1941, the Boričevac pit

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152 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 48-50; idem., “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” 432-434; see also Mušeta, Kulen Vakuf, 36.


154 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 50.
was to become the central site where the Ustashas would engage in the mass killing of Serbs in the Kulen Vukuf region.\footnote{According to some accounts, the mass killing of Serbs at the Boričevac pit, particularly of those from the Donji Lapac region (present-day Croatia), began early in the month of July. For the testimony of a survivor who was apparently taken to the pit on or around 2-3 July 1941, see Bogdan Ćučak, \textit{Nebljusi u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji, 1941.-1945.} (Beograd: Savez boraca NOR-a Nebljusci i Skupština opštine Donji Lapac, 1981), 35-39.}

The horrors which the Serbs were subjected to at the Boričevac pit can be best illustrated through the story of a man who managed to survive one of the mass killings which took place there. Vladimir Tankosić was born on 4 September 1916 in the village of Veliko Očijevo, located not far from Kulen Vukuf. On or around 25 July 1941, the Ustashas came to his village and arrested about 130 men and brought them to Kulen Vukuf.\footnote{ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen kod Sreskog suda u Drvaru, 12 December 1945, 1; Ibid., Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Saslušanje Vladimiria Tankosića po masovnom ubistvu u selu Boričevac dana 24.VII.1941, 28 March 1945, 1-2.} They were held prisoner in the town’s school. Throughout the night the Ustashas beat them with clubs. The next day they were marched in small groups out of town towards Boričevac. Just before reaching the village they were led off the road, through the forest, and to the mouth of the pit. Miroslav Matijević and several other Ustashas were waiting for them. The Serbs were first made to hand over all of their money, once again showing how the mass killing was intimately entwined with the pursuit of material gain. Then the Ustashas took them one by one to the edge of the pit, fired a shot into each man’s head and let each body fall into the dark hole.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Saslušanje Vladimiria Tankosića po masovnom ubistvu u selu Boričevac dana 24.VII.1941, 28 March 1945, 1-2.} As Tankosić remembered:

One Ustasha grabbed me, pulled my head up, and Matijević shot a bullet into my head. The bullet stayed inside. Blood came out of my nose, mouth and ears, and I fell into the
pit. It was around thirty meters deep. Then they threw a large stone in after me. Then they threw in Nikola Rodić, and then another stone after him. The whole time I was only half conscious. They killed six more after that.
The pit was full of dead bodies which were rotting. The stench was unbelievable. During the day there was enough light that I could see that there were around ten cradles in which there were dead children. Many of the dead bodies had their eyes poked out. In the pit were pieces of human flesh. There were men and women of all ages. I could barely move. Every night around eight to ten more people were killed and dumped into the pit.

On the third night Mile Pilipović from Rajinovci (a nearby Serbian village) fell into the pit. Mile had begged Matijević to kill him before killing his three sons because he could not bear to watch them be murdered. Matijević said to him: “Mile, Mile, you son of a whore, first I’m going to kill them, and only then will I kill you!” When Mile heard this he jumped on his own into the pit. I climbed over to where he was and he was terrified of me! It was easier after that for me because I had someone to talk to. The whole time we did not eat or drink anything. We survived by licking the rocks.

Throughout the last days of July 1941, this scenario of murder would be repeated again and again. The Ustashas entered other nearby Serbian villages in the Kulen Vakuf region such Rajinovci, Malo Očijevo and Veliki Stjenjani. Armed with rifles and axes, they arrested the Serb men who had not already fled, and then sometimes killed several on the spot. The rest they marched back to Kulen Vakuf. And after a night or two of torture in the school, the Ustasha murdered these Serbs in the same way as they had tried to kill Vladimir Tankosić and Mile Pilipović, who still lay at the bottom of the pit at Boričevac, exhausted and half alive in the midst of an ever growing pile of corpses.

158 Ibid.

159 Bibanović, Svedočanstvo jednog vremena, 51.


161 For examples of mass killings which took place at the Boričevac pit, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946, pp. 1-3; Ibid., Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 1; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946, 1. For another first-hand account by an individual who survived the mass killings at Boričevac, see the testimony of Đura Škorić in Đuro Zatezalo, ed., Nebljuški kraj u NOB-u,” in Gojko Vezmar and Đuro Zatezalo, eds., Kotar Donji Lapac u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu, 1941.-1945. (Karlovac: RO Informator OOUR Tiskara Zagreb, 1985), 209.
One striking aspect of many of these killings was their intimacy. In more than a few cases, such as that between the Serb villager Mile Pilipović and the Croat Ustasha Miroslav Matijević, victims and perpetrators knew each other.

Besides the Boričevac pit and the ditch near the Orthodox Church in Kulen Vakuf, the Ustashas dug a large hole near the train station outside the center of town and used this location for the nighttime murder of Serbs. The school was constantly full of Serb prisoners, and witnesses reported that Miroslav Matijević and other Ustashas would come and select around ten men every night. With battery-operated lamps they led them up the hill to the train station. There they cut their throats and dumped their bodies into the hole. When the Ustashas would return from these nightly killings, their arms were said to have been covered in blood up to their elbows. A precise figure of the total number of Serbs who the Ustashas killed in the Kulen Vakuf region during June and July of 1941 is difficult to determine, but it seems likely that there were nearly 600 victims.

Word of the extreme violence spread rapidly among the Serbs in the region. Some managed to flee to the forests as the Ustashas murdered their families and neighbors, and set fire to their villages. Hidden behind trees not far from their homes, they sometimes watched in horror as their loved ones were brutally killed. Severely

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163 This estimate is based on the following documents: AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 1-2; Ibid., kut., 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946, 1-5; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen kod Sreskog suda u Drvaru, 12 December 1945, 1; Ibid., Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Sraslušanje Vladimira Tankosića po masovnom ubistvu u selu Boričevac dana 24. VII. 1941, 28 March 1945, 1-2; AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946, 1-3; Ibid., Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 1; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946, 1.
shaken, they made their way to nearby Serbian villages and told what they had seen. Others somehow survived gunshots and blows from axes to walk half-conscious and bleeding out of the ditches and holes where the Ustashas had dumped their bodies. They returned to their villages and told their relatives and neighbors what they had endured.165

One thing these survivors had noticed was that the Ustashas appeared to all be wearing fezzes, the traditional hats worn only by Muslims. Another was that they heard most of the Ustashas calling each other by Muslim names. Despite the fact that more than a few were Croats, some evidence exists which suggests that all the Ustashas were apparently instructed by the NDH authorities to wear the fez and to call each other by Muslim names so as to give the impression that they were exclusively Muslims. The idea was to propagate the notion that they were “the Turks” of long ago, and had come to take revenge on the Serbs. This tactic, the Ustashas supposedly hoped, would further terrorize the Serbs and, most importantly, destroy any chance of combined Serb and Muslim resistance to their policies. Towards that end they sought to create an insurmountable level of hatred between the two groups.166 It should be noted, however, that direct

164 Emblematic of this traumatic experience is what a Serb from the village of Ripač, located around forty kilometers north of Kulen Vakuf, endured after the Ustashas attacked his village. After he escaped to the woods nearby his house, he watched as the Ustashas murdered his mother, his sisters-in-law, and all of their children. It was only after hiding for eight days in the forest that he was able to return to the house and bury their bodies. By then there were only bones left as dogs had torn apart the corpses. ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik bez broja, Mjesni odbor: Ripač, 31 July 1946, 1.

165 In some instances the stories that survivors told were so horrific that other Serbs, who had yet to be subjected to the terror of the Ustashas, simply could not believe them. For examples of how survivors communicated stories about the mass killings, see Plečaš-Nitonja, Požar u Krajini, 78-80.

166 On the supposed order given by the Ustasha leadership in Zagreb for all Ustashas to wear the fez while slaughtering Serbs in order to incite fratricidal hatred between Serbs and Muslims, see Arhiv Unsko-sansko-kantona (AUSK), Fond Sreski komitet Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine (SK SK BiH) Bihać, kut. 166, SK SK BiH Bihać, Memoarska grada sa područja Sreza Bihaća od 1940-1942. godine, 18 June 1958, 2; Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 54. See also “Svjedočenje Zaim ef. Zulić o teroru Četnika u Bosanskom Petrovcu (zapisnik)” in Tucaković, Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanim, 595. This document mentions witnesses from Kulen Vakuf who said they saw Ustashas wearing the fez and calling each other by Muslim names. Along the same lines, see Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o
evidence from the Ustashas which would confirm this interpretation is lacking. The idea of all Ustashas wearing the fez so as to portray the killings as committed solely by Muslims comes from witness statements of survivors, and from the statements of Muslim leaders in the NDH who protested to the authorities about the killings, partially out of moral revulsion, and partially out of fear of Serbian retribution against the Muslim community.

Whatever the case, the mass killings of Serbs and the actual participation by Muslims in the massacres had a profound effect on Serb-Muslim relations in the region, and particularly on Serb perceptions of their Muslim neighbors. When they found out about the horrific killings, and learned that Muslims had been among the perpetrators, a number of Serbs immediately severed their connections with all Muslims. Some neighbors who had been lifelong friends stopped talking to one another. Even more shocking was that the survivors of the massacres reported that some of the Muslim Ustashas were familiar faces from Kulen Vakuf. The notion thus began to spread that all “the Turks” of Kulen Vakuf were those responsible for all the killings. Kulen Vakuf quickly became known among the Serbs of the region as a town of Ustashas, a place where the murderers of their relatives and neighbors lived.167 This perception began to rapidly cement the notion that all the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley were somehow Ustashas, in spite of the fact that less than one percent had actually volunteered to

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167 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 54; Vukmanović, Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine, 130.
participate in the units, and that numerous Muslim had taken great risks to save their Orthodox neighbors.

What the mass killings triggered among many Serbs was essentially what James Waller has called “the psychological construction of the other.”168 For many of the survivors of the massacres, as well as for those who lost relatives, their Muslim neighbors—individual men, women, and children—rapidly transformed into collective groups of “Ustashas” and “Turks.” For these Serbs, all the Muslims had suddenly become the enemy. In order for the Serbs to stay alive and exact revenge, the logical conclusion for many was that all the Muslims would now need to be destroyed without mercy. “Us-them thinking,” that is, consciousness of national and religious difference, had long preceded the mass violence in the Kulen Vakuf which the Ustashas unleashed in the summer of 1941. And, for some, this type of thinking which existed prior to the massacres was that of antagonism. But what the mass killing did was to rapidly make these preexisting “soft” boundaries into “hard” lethal lines of division. As scholars of civil war and mass violence have observed in other contexts, the violence perpetrated by the Ustashas in the Kulen Vakuf region appears to have been less the result of deep prewar cleavages exploding to the surface, and more a catalyst for the rapid crystallization of hard boundaries among neighbors who, for the most part, had previously lived together in peace.169

168 Waller, Becoming Evil, 139.

The mass killings thus caused many of the Serbs to turn inward, to seek support and safety among their own people, and to cut themselves off from the Muslims in the region.\textsuperscript{170} For the most part, the ones who did not take this path were the Serbs whose lives Muslims had saved in the preceding weeks and months. Aside from them, the handful of Serb members of the Communist Party who lived in the region refused to condemn all Muslims as Ustashas. But the number of Serbs suffering at the hands of the Ustashas was growing rapidly by the day. And as the numbers of dead multiplied, so too did the hatred among many of the surviving Serbs for the all the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley who they increasingly viewed as collectively guilty for the killing of their relatives and neighbors.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Kecman-Hodak, “Sjećanja na Bušević, Kestenovac, Bosanske Štrpce i Kalate,” 150; Keča, “Ustanički dani u okolini Kulen Vakufu,” 199-200. This is a common phenomenon in societies experiencing mass violence or some other major upheaval. As the historian Jan Gross has written: “We must also recognize that during collective stress, revolution, and rapid social change, people acquire tunnel vision. They seem less capable of following, or being interesting in, the experience of others. Their own social class, their town, their city block, their own family, become the exclusive foci of all the energies and resources they can muster. Social interaction contracts as individuals retreat into the familiar intimacy of primary groups.” See Jan Gross, \textit{Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation} (New York: Random House, 2005), 251.

3. Primary locations where Ustaschas murdered Serbs, July-August 1941. Source: Drawn by the author.
II. The Insurgency

By the last days of July, the forests around the Serbian villages in the Kulen Vakuf region were full of Serbs hiding from the Ustashas. Many had witnessed unspeakable acts of violence and narrowly escaped the mass killings. They met in small groups deep among the thick trees and, while sharing their stories of tragedy and survival, some began to talk about resistance. Soon they began to gather weapons. And with news streaming in almost every day about the latest victims of the Ustashas, more and more of them began to speak about launching an attack in order to take revenge. As their anger at the barbarity of the Ustashas grew, it was matched by a fierce desire to exact vengeance.\textsuperscript{172}

Men who had been former gendarmes or who had served in the Yugoslav Army were the natural leaders of any armed resistance movement, and the Serb peasants in the forests gravitated around them. Nikola Karanović, a short man with dark hair and a mustache, and former army officer from the village of Ćovka, had enjoyed the respect of Serbs in the region long before the war even started. “We will fight against the evil which has happened to us,” he told his neighbors. Those hiding in the forests were quickly drawn to individuals such as Karanović who took it upon themselves to begin organizing an uprising.\textsuperscript{173}

Their weapons were scarce and primitive. Some had managed to hold on to old rifles, but they had little ammunition. Others simply carried farm tools, like axes.\textsuperscript{174} But


their anger and desire for revenge more than made up for their lack of arms. At the end of July they launched their first attack. Racing down from the forests around Martin Brod, a Serbian village located twelve kilometers south of Kulen Vakuf, and home to an ancient Serbian Orthodox monastery and church, they stormed the former gendermerie station. The Serbs quickly overpowered the Ustashas and liberated Martin Brod. The village, known for its spectacular waterfalls and natural springs, would now be a home base for these men who called themselves *ustanici*, “the insurgents.”

Emboldened by their success, a few days later several crept into Kulen Vakuf at night and managed to kill a Croat at the *Buk*, the place where the Una rushed through a gorge and where Miroslav Matijević owned a tavern and lived with his family. The Ustasha leader was enraged. He called a meeting the next day with fifty of the most influential Muslim men in Kulen Vakuf. They assembled at one of the town’s taverns. Matijević informed them that the Serbs had started an uprising, and that action needed to be taken immediately to stop them. He demanded that all those present mobilize the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf to follow him and go to the Serbian villages in order to kill and burn everything that was Serbian. When he finished, one of the Muslims present, Bećo Mašinović, stood up and began to speak. “Who are we supposed to go against Miro? Against our neighbors!? You really are crazy!” Matijević lunged forward in a fit of rage and tried to strike him, but the other men present protected him and pulled him out of the tavern. The meeting broke up shortly thereafter. Matijević’s attempt to enlist the most

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influential Muslim men of Kulen Vakuf in the mass murder of the region’s Serbs had failed. For the vast majority of them, the idea of attacking and killing their Orthodox Christian neighbors was unthinkable. It ran counter to their lifelong experiences of living in peace with the vast majority of Serbs in the region. The reaction of the Muslims at the meeting suggests that preexisting hatred towards Serbs, at least by the most influential men in Kulen Vakuf, was not widespread even after the German invasion of Yugoslavia and the subsequent establishment of the NDH. In fact, some Muslims were apparently so disturbed by what Matijević demanded of them that they began plotting to murder him. In the end, however, the man whose responsibility it was to kill the Ustasha leader was too terrified to go through with it out of fear of retribution against his family.\footnote{Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 63.} This suggests that some local Muslims did indeed fear the small number of Ustasas; at the same time, however, their concern about repercussions apparently was not significant enough to compel them to participate in mass violence against their Serb neighbors.\footnote{This is a crucial difference between the mass killings perpetrated by the Ustasas in the Kulen Vakuf region during the Second World War and other instances of mass violence, such as the genocide in Rwanda that Hutus carried out against their Tutsi neighbors. As Scott Straus argues, one of the central reasons for the widespread participation of many Hutus in the genocide was their very real fear of serious repercussions for themselves and their families if they did not take part in the killings of Tutsis. See Straus, The Order of Genocide, 10, 96, 122, 227.}

By the end of July 1941 the atmosphere in the Kulen Vakuf region began to change. Word of the Serb uprising was quickly spreading, and now it was the Ustasas who were increasingly apprehensive and nervous. Shortly after the insurgent attack on Martin Brod, the Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued a call on 27 July 1941 for a general uprising against what it called “the fascist occupier and its domestic collaborators.” The handful of Serb Communists in the greater Kulen Vakuf region, such
as Ranko Šipka from the village of Veliko Očijevo and Milan Medić from Martin Brod, began trying to organize the peasant insurgents into a guerrilla army which was to fight for liberation and socialist revolution. In carrying out this task, however, they immediately encountered sizable difficulties. To begin with, their numbers among the Serb insurgents were exceptionally small, which drastically reduced their capacity to exert widespread influence. With the peasant insurgents, moreover, they often lacked the necessary authority that other prominent local Serbs had—especially former gendarmes and soldiers of the Yugoslav army. The insurgent units, if they could be labeled as such, often formed because of the personality and popularity of a local commander, or because of family ties. Many of the Serb Communists, while usually having roots in the villages of the region, had spent significant periods of their lives in urban areas as workers or students, which is where they were exposed to the Communist movement. As a result, they frequently lacked the crucial local connections and levels of trust and respect that non-Communist commanders enjoyed among the peasant insurgents. There was, therefore, a chasm between the Communist leadership, which endeavored to take the reins of the uprising, and the Serb peasant insurgents and their non-Communist commanders who were capable of doing most of the actual fighting.

Another major point of tension between the would-be Communist leadership and the Serb peasant insurgents was the issue of collaborating with Muslims and Croats. The Communists hoped that fighters of all nationalities would join the uprising and fight

178 Ibid., 61.

179 On the contradictory social bases of the insurgency and the key problems that nearly caused the failure of the Communist movement during the first year of the war, see Hurem, *Kriza Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine*, 33-71.
together against fascism. But for many of the Serb insurgents, Muslims and Croats were not only unwelcome among their ranks; they were the main enemy. Many Serbs who took up arms even stated explicitly that they had joined the insurgents to fight against “the Turks.” Some of these fighters appear to have had chauvinistic sentiments towards Croats, and especially Muslims, which predated the violence of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{180} For these insurgents, the uprising presented an opportunity to take revenge on the Ustashas, as well as on all Muslims and Croats, who many collectively viewed as Ustashas, and to settle older disputes with their neighbors of different nationalities.\textsuperscript{181} From its inception, the insurgency was thus a complex mix of contradictory social groups who had very different and often conflicting agendas. In the Kulen Vakuf region during the late days of July and early August 1941, the imperative to fight for survival in the

\textsuperscript{180} An important subject for future research would be to investigate the long-term conflicts among Serbs, Muslims, and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the local level that created the context for the local mass violence that erupted once the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia and installed the Ustashas in power. Dulič suggests that the long-standing disputes between Muslim landlords and Serb peasants was surely a central factor in these conflicts, as were Serb perceptions of Croatian disloyalty towards the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and a sense, particularly among Serbs, of an age-old struggle between Serbs and Muslims for political control. Dulič, \textit{Utopias of Nation}, 334. These points, while interesting and suggestive, are not supported in his study by much evidence. See also Marko Atilla Hoare, \textit{The History of Bosnia. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day} (London and Beruit: Saqi Books, 2007), 413-414, who argues for the central importance of the long-term conflict in Ottoman Bosnia between Muslim landlords and predominately Orthodox peasants in setting the stage for the mass violence between Serbs and Muslims during the Second World War. Serb anger at former Muslim landlords and Muslim resentment about the land reforms carried out by the Yugoslav regime after 1918 were the key factors, he argues, which created a fertile environment for mass violence. Again, like the arguments put forth by Dulič, these are interesting, but nonetheless stand on very little evidence and thus remain subjects for future research, especially at the local level.

\textsuperscript{181} It seems possible to hypothesize that among this fraction of the insurgents were those who were heirs to the Serbs, at least in political outlook, who came to Kulen Vakuf in 1918 with the intention of slaughtering all the town’s Muslim inhabitants. On Serb insurgents who believed that Muslims and Croats were their main enemies, see Milan Majstorović and Mićo Medić, “Doljani u narodnom ustanku,” in \textit{Ustanak naroda Jugoslavije 1941, Zbornik. Knjiga 5} (Beograd: Vojno delo, 1964), 461; Lukač, \textit{Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini}, 93, 103, 190-191. For the argument that some Serb insurgents were driven by their desire to settle scores with Muslims based on conflicts from the prewar period, see Hurem, \textit{Kriza Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine}, 40.
face of Ustasha terror was what all insurgents agreed upon. And an intense desire for revenge was the essential glue which bound the vast majority of them together.¹⁸²

Not much time would pass before a first major chance came to settle scores with their enemies. During the final days of July 1941, one of the commanders of the insurgents in the Kulen Vakuf region, a Serb Communist by the name of Stevan Pilipović “Maćuka” from village of Cvjetnić, sent his men to attack Boričevac and to block the road to Kulen Vakuf. Their assault on the village caused the Ustashas there to panic. Outnumbered and stunned by the ferocity with which the insurgents were fighting, they ordered the entire population of about 1,400 Croatian villagers to flee to Kulen Vakuf on the night of 1 August 1941. The Serb fighters entered the village the next day.¹⁸³ Their desire to take revenge on the Croats was so strong that the insurgent commander Nikola Karanović was afraid that a massacre would take place. He was relieved to see that the Ustashas had already fled and taken the villagers with them.¹⁸⁴ Many of the insurgents had heard hair-raising stories about the Boričevac pit, and a group of them quickly left the village in search of the place where so many of their relatives and neighbors had been killed. A man who had survived the killings there led them towards it. They arrived and found the edges of the pit covered in a sticky pool of semi-dried blood, indicating that the Ustashas had murdered Serbs there not long before the insurgents overran Boričevac. Around the pit they found various pieces of peasant clothing and a number of severed


¹⁸³ Pilipović, “Borba Cvetničana na petrovačkom području,” 588; Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 64.

heads. Apparently the eyes had been poked out, and the ears, noses and tongues cut off.\footnote{\textit{Plećaš-Nitonja, Požar u Krajini}, 78-79.} One man described what happened next as they peered into the pit:

> It was difficult to approach the pit due to the stench on the hot day. We came to the opening and yelled down to hear if someone was alive, but no one answered. We yelled down that we had started an uprising, that we had overrun and liquidated Boričevac, and that we had expelled the Ustasha evildoers to Kulen Vakuf. Then we heard a voice: “Brother, save me!” There were two men alive in the pit. We lowered a rope and pulled them out. They looked exhausted and were very thin. Their clothes were covered in blood and dirt. They were Mile Pilipović from Rajinovci and Vlado Tankosić from Veliko Očijevo. They had been in the pit for nine days and nine nights.\footnote{Pilipović, “Borba Cvjetničana na petrovačkom području,” 589.}

The two survivors recounted to the insurgents in graphic detail what they had endured during the previous ten days. Tankosić told how Matijević had shot him in the head and then dumped him into the pit. He explained how he had survived among the corpses for three days before Pilipović threw himself in, attempting to take his own life when it was clear that Matijević was going to murder his three sons in front of him. They told how the pit was full of the bodies of men and women and children, and how the Ustashas had thrown babies still in their cradles to their deaths. Those listening were deeply shaken. After hearing the horrific stories from the half-conscious, blood-soaked men, and after seeing the pit where so many of their neighbors and relatives have been murdered, they marched back to Boričevac. As some began to herd away the livestock, much of which the Ustashas had stolen in the previous weeks from Serbian villages, the insurgents set every house on fire. Soon the entire village was engulfed in flames. The horrors they witnessed at the Boričevac pit only increased their desire to take revenge on those who
were causing them so much pain and loss. As one insurgent later said: “So much blood had been spilled that the sorrow and pain overwhelmed understanding. The desire for vengeance in those dramatic days of the war was all consuming.”

Their opportunity came several days later. After burning Boričevac to the ground, hundreds of furious Serb insurgents walked north through the forests towards the Croatian villages of Vrtoče and Krnjeuša. On or around 8 August 1941, and under the command of Mane Rovkić, they launched simultaneous attacks on both villages, catching the Ustashas and villagers off guard. There was no time for any kind of evacuation. This time the insurgents finally got what they wanted: blood vengeance. After making quick work of the Ustashas at Vrtoče, the insurgents went on a killing spree that was no different in method and ferocity than what the Ustashas had done during the previous weeks in Serbian villages. Among their first victims were the parents of the Ustasha leader Miroslav Matijević, whom they slaughtered. They then murdered a local tavern owner, Josip Matijević, whose head they apparently cut off and placed on stick. While carrying it around, they killed nine members of his family, and then executed every other Croat they could find in the village.

At the village of Krnjeuša, the insurgents apparently captured the local Catholic priest, Krešimir Barić, and then cut off his fingers, nose, ears, and poked out his eyes.

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187 For the effects on the insurgents of seeing the pit at Boričevac, see Ibid.; Karanović, “Sadještvo sa ličkim ustanicima,” 410. On the burning of the village by the insurgents, see Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom IV, knjiga I, Borbe u Bosni i Hercegovini (Beograd: Vojno-istoriški institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 106, Naređenje Štaba prvog bataljona “Sloboda” od 8. septembra 1941. god. Komandama četvrtog odreda, odreda u Boboljuskama, Velikom i Malom Ćvjetniću i Osredcima za raspored snaga, 8 September 1941, 237.


189 On the killings at Vrtoče, see Odmetnička zvjerstva i postošenja u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj u prvim mjesecima života Hrvatske Narodne Države (Zagreb: Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova NDH, 1942), 38; Bibanović, Sjvedočanstvo jednog vremena, 65.
They set the church on fire with him inside. They killed the local leader of the village, Ivan Matijević, along with his wife and five children, the youngest being six years old. They then murdered whomever they came across, including the elderly. Ustasha sources indicate that the insurgents killed about 130 Croats in Vrtoče and Krnjeuša, but the number may have been much higher, as other sources suggest that nearly 400 perished in the twin massacres. Aside from exacting revenge, the twin attacks resulted in the insurgents acquiring a large amount of weapons, including 391 rifles, eleven heavy and eighteen light machine guns and a large amount of ammunition. This radically increased their effectiveness as a fighting force. The mass killings of Croats at Vrtoče and Krnjeuša would have most likely not occurred without the German invasion and the subsequent Ustasha massacres of Serbs. Such an observation is not meant to excuse or justify the violence of the insurgents, but rather serves to better explain the underlying causes and dynamics of the killing. The Serb insurgents clearly showed themselves to be capable of committing brutal murders of Croat civilians; yet it appears that situational factors—i.e., the war and the Ustasha killings of Serbs—were the main factors that triggered their violent acts, and less so deep-seated political convictions and long-term hatreds, although for some individuals these may have been of sizable consequence.

The Ustasha Miroslav Matijević was so incensed when he learned of the attack on his home village of Vrtoče, and the murder of his parents, that he went immediately to the school in Kulen Vakuf. Vividly demonstrating how the cycle of extreme violence in the

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190 For information on the massacre at Krnjeuša produced by the Ustasha, as well as for statistics on the numbers of those killed, see Ibid., 38-42; For a source that argues for a higher number of dead, see Bibanović, *Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena*, 65

191 The statistics on the quantities of arms taken during the attacks comes from Bibanović, *Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena*, 82.
region was cascading beyond anyone’s control, he took revenge by killing six Serb men and nineteen women and children who had been locked inside as prisoners. It was now clear that the Serb peasant insurgents were capable of committing mass killings just like the Ustashas. The new waves of slaughter by the insurgents increased the already high levels of polarization and fear in the region among Serbs, Muslims and Croats. This only added to the enormous damage which the Ustashas had already done to the tradition of neighborliness and peace in the region across the lines of nationality and confession. The German invasion and the context of war; the unexpected ascendancy of the Ustashas; their radical decision to use violence, among other methods, to remake the national composition of the population—all these factors had now engendered a violent Serb reaction. It was these situational factors which had rapidly set into a motion a chain reaction of mass killing that was now spiraling out of control.

Nevertheless, some inter-ethnic friendships still continued in spite of the extreme violence, and, paradoxically, appeared to even deepen because of it. One of the best friends of Mujo Lipovaća, a Muslim from the village of Ćukovi, was Gojko Pilipović, a Serb from the village of Lipa. Despite the ongoing Ustasha killings and the massacres which the Serb insurgents had committed, they never stopped talking. One day in mid August, Mujo went to give Gojko a bag of flour. On the way he ran into a group of insurgents, but they let him pass after one recognized him. He and Gojko kissed and hugged each other, and then cried together as they talked about the horrific violence which was happening every day. Later, once Mujo had returned home, a Muslim Ustasha from his village informed the head Ustasha in the nearby village of Orašac about where

192 Ibid., 65
he had been. They arrested Lipovača and took him back to Orašac. He was only freed after a large group of angry Muslim men from Ćukovi came to where he was being held and demanded his release, screaming “Fuck your Ustasha mothers!” at the Muslim Ustashas in Orašac who were holding him. Such a story illuminates the complexity of wartime social relations and the limitations of attempting to explain such relations solely through the lens of national conflict. In this case, inter-ethnic friendship paradoxically appears to have deepened as a result of the mass violence, while intra-Muslim conflict—i.e., between Muslim Ustashas and those opposed, or indifferent to them—was becoming a more salient feature of wartime life.

Another story from around the same time further illustrates this dynamic. In the Muslim village of Klisa, the local Ustashas ordered all the Muslim men to report for participation in a so-called “economic action” to be carried out in the nearby Serbian village of Bušević. Meho Hasanagić knew that this euphemism meant that the Ustashas were seeking men to help them attack their Serb neighbors. Living in that village was Hasanagić’s best friend, a Serb whom he had worked with in a coal mine in France during the 1930s when the two had gone abroad in search of work. They were like brothers. Hasanagić, like many other Muslims in Klisa, ignored the Ustashas’ order, and instead climbed up the hill in the center of the village where the mosque was located, and hid behind it. The Ustashas eventually found him and ordered him to go with them to Bušević. He refused. One armed Ustasha approached him, intent on forcing him to accompany the rest to help kill Serbs. Hasanagić, who was holding a pistol, warned the man that if he came any closer he would shoot. The Ustasha did not stop, and so

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193 Ibid., 75-76.
Hasanagić fired a bullet which hit him in the head, killing him instantly. The other Ustashas then managed to overpower him, and they took him to the prison in Kulen Vakuf. Ultimately, they attacked the Serbs in Bušević, and Hasanagić’s best friend was among those they murdered.\footnote{Ibid., 78-79. Interview with Mujo Hasanagić (son of Muho Hasanagić) on 26 September 2008 in Klisa.}

7. View of the village of Klisa. The mosque on the hill is where Meho Hasanagić went to hide from the local Ustaschas and nearby it was where he eventually shot and killed one of them. Photograph taken by the author on 27 September 2008.

Yet again, such a story demonstrates how even in the midst of the most extreme nationalist violence the region had ever witnessed, the long-standing tradition of friendship across the lines of nationality, while battered, was difficult to completely extinguish. Some individuals, such as Meho Hasanagić, took great risks in order not to betray their friendships with Serbs, despite the ongoing mass killing which was occurring
nearly every day. And, like the previous story, what happened by the mosque in Klisa once again reveals that the mass violence which the Ustashas perpetrated against Serbs had the unintended consequence of bringing about increasingly intense conflicts among Muslims.

Throughout the second half of August 1941 the Ustashas in the Kulen Vakuf region continued their attacks on Serbian villages and the mass killing of Serbs. During this time they began to engage in the widespread murder of Serb women and children, pushing the local violence towards the level of genocide. In many cases they were the only Serbs left in the villages given that most of the men had taken to the forests during the previous weeks to join the insurgents. Esad Bibanović has suggested that the intensification of the violence was apparently part of a conscious attempt to provoke a general war between the Serb insurgents and the Muslims and Croats in the region. This, the Ustashas supposedly hoped, would eventually weaken the peasant fighters who had quickly become a formidable adversary. This may have been the case, but direct documentation from the Ustashas has not surfaced which would confirm such an interpretation. Regardless, the intensification of the violence by the Ustashas was not due to the policies, encouragement, or involvement of the outside forces that contributed to the creation and maintenance of the NDH (i.e., the Germans and Italians). The mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region was a local affair, made possible by the German invasion and

\[195\] Ibid., 77. On the killing of Serb women and children during the second half of August 1941, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 3. This document shows that the Ustashas had murdered nearly 200 Serb women and children in the village of Kalati by 30 August 1941. For an example of an instance in which the Ustashas killed women and children by locking them in a house and setting it on fire, see ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946, 1.
establishment of the NDH, but conceived of, and carried out, exclusively by a small number of local Muslims and Croats.

Vladimir Veber, the Croat commander of the *Domobrani* units [“Homeguards,” the regular army units of the NDH] in Kulen Vakuf, and apparently less of an extremist than the Ustasha military commander Miroslav Matijević, contacted the NDH authorities in Bihać and asked for reinforcements to be sent to help with the worsening situation in the region. He was concerned about defending the town in case of an insurgent attack. The authorities in Bihać immediately sent a sizable detachment of *Domobrani* to Kulen Vakuf. As the soldiers passed through the scorched village of Boričevac, Serb insurgents suddenly appeared out of the forest and ambushed them. In the space of a few minutes they managed to kill every one of them: six officers, seventeen non-commissioned officers, and 189 soldiers. Yet another large cache of weapons fell into the insurgents’ hands: 191 rifles, eleven light and seven heavy machine guns, and a huge quantity of ammunition and other military-related supplies.197

After the ambush at Boričevac a new situation on the ground came into focus. The Ustashas in Kulen Vakuf were now unable to receive supplies and military reinforcements. The Serb insurgents had completely cut them off from Bihać, their main supply station. Now the insurgents, who outnumbered the Ustashas, were much better armed. The large cache of weapons they acquired, when added to those they had taken after massacring the Croats at Vrtoča and Knjueša, made them a formidable and well-armed fighting force. And now, all those in the Ljutoč valley—Matijević and his

196 When possible, Veber apparently freed prisoners at the request of their families whom the Ustashas had locked inside the primary school in Kulen Vakuf. See Bibanović, “Kulenvukufski komunisti i radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” 435.

197 Ibid., 76; Pilipović, “Borba Cvjetničana na petrovačkom području,” 593.
Ustashas, but also thousands of Muslim civilians who lived under their authority—were completely surrounded. Looking down on them from the densely forested hills was a sizable group of angry, vengeful, and well-armed Serb peasant fighters. The vast majority wanted nothing else except to pay back in kind the pain and suffering that they and their relatives and neighbors had endured during the previous months.

The small number of Serb Communists in the region, who had seen up close at Boričevac, Vrtoče, and Krnjeuša exactly what most of the insurgents understood as revenge, were worried about the mentality of peasant fighters whom they were trying to command. As the local Communist Ljubo Babić wrote in a letter in August 1941 to Đuro Pucar “Stari,” a delegate of the Provincial Committee of the Community Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Bosnian Krajina: “The political consciousness of the fighters is weak. Because of this weakness, injustices have taken place: chauvinistically inclined elements have attacked innocent people in some places and have carried out the large-scale burning of villages (Boričevac). We need experienced cadres.”

But the shortage of “experienced cadres” was a major problem for the Communist leadership throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in August 1941. The Provincial Committee simply had none to send. So the Serb Communists in the greater Kulen Vakuf region attempted to exert greater control by trying to reorganize the units of peasant fighters in the region during the second half of August. Their main objective towards this end was to mold them into what would become known as the second battalion of the “Drvar Brigade,” named after the Bosnian town of Drvar located

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southeast of Kulen Vakuf. The battalion’s leadership was composed of some of the men who had led the previous attacks in the region during late July and early August. Stevan Pilipović “Maćuka,” who had led the assault on Boričevac, was one of the commanders. His political commissar was alternatively Gojko Polovina and Đoko Jovanić, who were Serb Communists from the village of Suvaja, located in Lika. Supposedly under their authority were a number of local commanders, some of whom were fellow Communists and others who were not. These individuals were responsible for directing insurgent units which were organized by village. The units did not represent any kind of firm Communist organization. None had Communist Party organizations. And the authority of the commanders who were Communists, or who were Communist sympathizers, was frequently upstaged by other local Serbs. A number of these men, who had deep ties to their fellow villagers, were apparently imbued with highly chauvinistic sensibilities towards Muslims and Croats, which were counter to what the Communists believed.

This motley assortment of commanders directed nearly a thousand armed peasant insurgents in the hills and mountains which surrounded the Ljutoč valley. They had now cut the Muslims off from the outside world. Some, like Aden Harašić, a Muslim of Kulen Vakuf, who was aware of the danger which the insurgents presented, demanded the right to leave town. “I’m not going to wait for them to kill me and rape my sister like

199 Drvar had a number of large wood processing factories, and the workers’ movement had taken hold there before the Second World War. As a result, the town was a center of power for the Communist-inspired uprising due to the unusually high numbers of activists. On the history of the workers’ movement and the Communist uprising in Drvar, see Drvar, 1941-1945. Sjećanja učesnika, knjiga 1. (Drvar: Skupština opštine Drvar, 1972).

200 Bibanović, Sjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 81-83.
the rest of you!” he yelled out during a conversation with the local Ustasha authorities. On a visit to Kulen Vakuf, but trapped because of the ongoing fighting, a Croat named Franjo Odić urged his Muslim friend, Ibrahim Bibanović, who was a member of the Communist Party, to run away from Kulen Vakuf and join the insurgents in the forest. Well aware that as a Muslim he might not receive a warm welcome among many of the insurgents, Ibrahim responded: “I don’t know where to go. I don’t know what they will think of me! I don’t know who’s up there. Who’s leading the insurgency?!“ Other Muslims apparently attempted to contact Osman-beg Kulenović, the vice-president of the Ustasha government in Zagreb, who had roots in Kulen Vakuf, in order to explain their predicament and demand permission to flee the valley. His position was unambiguous: “Kulen Vakuf is the key to Bihać. There will be no talk of leaving, not until the last man falls.” The Muslims were now trapped.

Their situation in the valley, and especially in Kulen Vakuf, grew worse by the day. All of the fighting in the region brought scores of refugees to town. Many slept outdoors due to the lack of housing. Food supplies ran low. Hygiene was poor and dysentery became more widespread. There was fear that an outbreak of typhus would occur. On 26 August 1941, the 1,400 or so Croatian refugees from Boričevac managed to flee Kulen Vakuf. They arrived a day later in Bihać. The Muslims, however, were apparently forbidden to leave. Matijević had around fifty Ustashas and Veber around 150 Homeguards for the purposes of defending the town. They believed they

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201 Ibid., 77.


203 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 78.

204 Milan N. Zorić, Drvar u ustanku četrdeset prve (Beograd: Vojno delo, 1963), 273.
would most likely be able to marshal together another 200-250 civilians to fight. As the last days of August 1941 passed, the two men did nothing but wait.  

Sometime during the final week of August Veber apparently decided that the situation had become critical. It was clear that the Ustahsas would be incapable of defending Kulen Vakuf and the Muslims of the Ljutoć valley in the event of an insurgent attack. He decided that the only option was to abandon Kulen Vakuf and flee with the entire Muslim population of the valley to Bihać, as the Croats from Boričevac had managed to do several days earlier. His plan was to wait until early September for the birthday of King Peter II, the Serbian King of Yugoslavia who was in exile in London. His gamble was that the Serb insurgents would celebrate this holiday in their villages, thus giving him, the Ustahsas, and all of the Muslims of the Ljutoć valley a chance to flee.  

Veber’s gamble proved catastrophic. On 4 September 1941, the insurgents, under the command of the Communist Stevan Pilipović “Maćuka,” launched an attack on the Ljutoć valley. They descended from the hills at its northern end and began a furious assault on the Muslim village of Ćukovi. Only five Ustahsas and fourteen armed peasants were in the village. Together they had sixteen rifles and three machine guns. The Ustahsas fled as soon as the insurgents appeared and began firing. But the Muslims of Ćukovi refused to surrender. They yelled out of their houses to the insurgents: “We’re not Ustahsas, but Ćukovi has never surrendered, no one has ever

205 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 83.
206 Ibid., 90-91.
207 Ibid., 84.
conquered the village, and you won’t either!”208 A fierce battle ensued. The Muslims blasted away all afternoon at the insurgents from their windows. As the Serb Communist Gojko Polovina later remembered: “Our fighters were not able to take a single one of their houses without first setting it on fire. Only when they saw that it was burning would they leave the house and go to the next, which they would not leave until it too began to burn.”209 After around five hours of fierce fighting, the insurgents had managed to set nearly every house in the village on fire. The few remaining Muslims finally fled south to the neighboring village of Orašac.210

What happened next vividly illustrated the conflicting desires and differing ideological positions of the Serb insurgents. Munira Dedić had remained in Ćukovi with her three sons while the battle raged. As the insurgents set the last houses on fire, she finally decided to take her children and flee to Orašac. Not far outside of Ćukovi several insurgents caught up to them as they ran and captured them. Without consulting their commanders, they murdered all four on the spot. Two more Muslim women from Ćukovi had fled just before Munira and her children. The insurgents continued running

208 Gojko Polovina, Svjedočenje. Prva godina ustanka u Lici (Beograd: Izdavačka radna organizacija „Rad,“ 1988), 85; On the relatively unknown history of Muslims who were not Ustashas but who nonetheless fiercely defended their villages from Serb insurgents, see Rasim Hurem, „Samo su branili svoja sela,” Ogledalo, Godina 1, broj 2, prosinac/decembar, 32.

209 Ibid. The intensity of the battle was such that after the war a saying, which rhymes in Bosnian, was popular among Muslims in Ćukovi whenever they spoke about it: “While one house was burning, the battle was waged from the next!” In Bosnian: Dok je jedna kuća gorila, iz druge se borbė vodila!

210 Đoko Jovanić, Rata sjećanja (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1988), 124. For general information on the fierce nature of the battle for Ćukovi, see Abdulah Sarajlić and Dragutin Strunaš, “Prvi dani ustanka u Drvaru i okolini,” in Godišnjak istorijskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine, Godina II, Sarajevo, 1950, 15; Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga I, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god. (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1952), br. 42, “Izvještaj štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarsko brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji, undated, but appears to have been written on or about September 15, 1941, 132.
ahead, and quickly caught them as well. Once again, without consulting any of their commanders, they executed the women on the spot. Hadžera Lipovača, who had fled earlier, was doing everything she could to escape from the insurgents, but she was with her five children and was moving very slowly. Yet again the insurgents caught up. But by this time the Serb Communist Stevo Ovuka had managed to join them. He jumped in between the insurgents and Hadžera and her children and protected them.211 While all the insurgents were committed to attacking and destroying the Ustashas in the Ljutoč valley, these killings indicated that they had radically different opinions about how to treat Muslim civilians. For some, especially the handful of Communists, the Ustashas were their enemy, but the innocent Muslim civilians of the Ljutoč valley needed to be protected. Yet for many others, there appeared to be no difference between the Ustashas and the rest of the Muslim population. The fact that some of the Ustashas were Muslims meant that revenge needed to be taken against all Muslims. And so, for these insurgents, they were all to be destroyed without mercy.

The terrified residents of Ćukovi came streaming into Orašac over the course of the evening, calling out to their Muslim neighbors, “the Chetniks are coming and they are slaughtering everyone!”212 Their choice of the word “Chetniks,” [četnici] rather than “insurgents” [ustanici], indicated that they did not view the Serb peasant fighters merely as armed men fighting against the Ustashas for the liberation of their lands. On the contrary, calling them “Chetniks” meant that they viewed them as no different from the Serb paramilitary units who originated and went by the same name during the period of Ottoman rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main objective of these fighters had

211 Bibanović, Sjeveročanstvo jednog vremena, 85.

212 Ibid., 86.
been to destroy the Ottomans, or “the Turks” (i.e., Muslims), as they were commonly known, as a primary means of achieving national liberation.\textsuperscript{213} News of the attack on Ćukovi, and the killing of innocent Muslim women and children, spread like wildfire throughout Orašac. The residents of the village were filled with panic. They quickly gathered together as many of their belongings as they could and then raced with the refugees from Ćukovi to the edge of the Una. On the other side of the river was the Muslim village of Klisa. They screamed across to their neighbors in Klisa that the Chetniks had attacked and were coming to murder them. For the rest of the evening, and all through the night, the Muslims of Klisa rowed small boats back and forth across the rushing waters of the Una, shuttling their Muslim neighbors to temporary safety. The vast crowd waiting on the river bank for their turn to cross was filled with the sounds of women and children crying. The echoes of the shots that the insurgents were firing in the distance from their rifles and machine guns would only occasionally drown out the weeping.\textsuperscript{214}

While this massive rescue effort unfolded on the banks of the Una, the insurgents arrived in Orašac. Yet again illustrating their conflicting desires and purposes, rather than pushing on towards Kulen Vakuf to attack the main Ustasha center of power in the valley, a large number of them stopped fighting; instead, they turned their attention to stealing everything they possibly could from the Muslim houses.\textsuperscript{215} As they plundered Orašac, and the little that remained in Ćukovi which had not been burned, the Muslim

\textsuperscript{213} On the history of the Chetniks in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Ottoman rule and during the interwar period, see Šehić, Četništvo u Bosni i Hercegovini, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{214} Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 86-87.

\textsuperscript{215} Lukač, Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini, 181.
refugees from the two villages began making their way to Kulen Vakuf. By around 4:00 PM the next day, on 5 September, the vast majority had arrived. The town was by now literally bursting at its seams with refugees. Joining Kulen Vakuf’s Muslim population of around 2,000 were nearly 3,700 refugees. The town’s population had almost tripled in the space of a single day. The thousands of Muslim refugees found whatever space they could and rested with their few belongings and whatever livestock they had managed to bring with them.216

Around an hour later, the Ustasha administrative leader of Kulen Vakuf, Vladimir Veber, summoned all the men to the main square in the centre of town located next the mosque. Once they had assembled, he revealed his plan. Early the next morning, on 6 September, every single man, woman and child was to assemble. The Ustashas and the Domobrani would then escort the entire Muslim population of the Ljutoč valley, as well as the handful of Croats in Kulen Vakuf, to the city of Bihać. Everyone was ordered to leave; there would be no exceptions. The residents of Kulen Vakuf had mixed feelings about Veber’s order. On one hand, they were immensely relieved to be leaving the valley for a more secure location. Many were terrified of how the Serb insurgents would treat them, especially after hearing the news of what happened to the Muslim women and children from Ćukovi who had been murdered after fleeing the village. On the other hand, there was immense sadness. They were distraught about leaving behind the place they loved, and abandoning their homes, property, and livelihoods.217 Only three Muslims chose to disobey Veber’s order and remain in Kulen Vakuf. Esad Bibanović, his brother Ibrahim, and Džafer Demirović, who were members of the Communist Party,

216 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 87.
217 Ibid., 88, 90.
decided to wait in town for the arrival of the insurgents. They hoped to join them in the fight against fascism.\textsuperscript{218} As night fell, the Muslims packed up their remaining belongings. Adults spoke quietly among themselves about the coming day. The children were scared and nervous. One young boy named Abas Mušeta tried to remember the advice his grandmother had given him. If the “Vlachs” (a derogatory for Serbs) attacked, she said, the best place to hide from them would be in the Una River. He would be safe in the water. According to the old woman, none of the Serbs knew how to swim.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{219} Mušeta, \textit{Kulen Vakuf}, 19.
4. Primary locations of insurgent activity, late July-4 September, 1941. Source: Drawn by the author.
III. The Massacres of 6-8 September 1941

The sun rose on the morning of 6 September into an intensely blue, cloudless sky. The Muslims were anxiously waiting for Veber’s order to leave. Not long after daybreak, the residents of Kulen Vakuf set free their livestock into the nearby meadows and unleashed their dogs, which began wandering around town. At around 10:00 AM, Veber gave the order to begin the evacuation. A huge column of nearly 5,600 people began making their way up the small hill which leads north out of Kulen Vakuf. At its head were armed Ustashas and Domobrani who Veber had positioned in case of an attack by the insurgents. Following along were all the Muslim residents of the Ljutoč valley. Men drove horse-drawn carts which were packed full of clothing, food, and possessions. The women bounced along next to them or in back while holding babies at their chests and the hands of their older children. The elderly and sick lay in back. Many more, especially the refugees from Ćukovi and Orašac, had no choice but to walk. Tears ran down the faces of many of the refugees out of sadness for leaving their homes and fear of what awaited them during the trek to Bihać. A cloud of dust slowly rose from the road.

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221 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 90.

222 Some debate exists about where the Ustashas had positioned themselves in the column. Bibanović argues that they were leading the refugees. For his view, see ibid. But others claim that the Ustashas had placed the Muslim civilians at the front to act as a sort of shield in case of an insurgent attack. For this interpretation, see Pero Pilipović, “Istina o jednom zločinu,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga II (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 604. Pilipović’s position has little logic, especially given that Veber ordered the evacuation of Kulen Vakuf in large part because he sought to save the lives of the Muslims there. It makes little sense that he would then expose them to great risk by having them lead the column.

223 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 90; idem., “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” 446.
into the morning air as the Muslims made their way north along the valley. At their left they could still see the gurgling waters of the Una shimmering in the sunlight. Not far from town, the column made a sharp right, and began climbing the hills which would lead them to Vrtoče. The only way out of the valley was to pass through this village, the place where the Ustasha Miroslav Matijević had been born, and the same place where the insurgents had slaughtered his parents and many other Croat villagers a month earlier.

Shortly after the column left Kulen Vakuf, the three Muslim Communists who had chosen to remain in town—Esad and Ibrahim Bibanović and Džafer Demirović—walked to the centre. They managed to open a shop and in it they searched for and found a large piece of red cloth. This was to be the flag they would fly in order to show the insurgents that only Communists remained in town, and that they were ready to join their Serb comrades in the fight against fascism. After cutting the material into the appropriate shape, they walked towards the mosque. The three men entered the building and climbed the steep spiral staircase of the minaret until they emerged at the top. They then unfurled the flag. Kulen Vakuf was now in Communist hands, so they thought. Waiting for the insurgents to arrive, they stared out at the hills.224

Around four to five kilometers outside of Kulen Vakuf, the long column approached the Serbian villages of Prkosi and Ćovka. Then, without warning, insurgents under the command of Stevan Pilipovic “Maćuka” and Nikola Karanović, who were hidden in the forests, opened fire from all sides. The Ustahas and Domobrani returned fire and instantly a fierce battle was underway. While the initial wave of insurgent shooting was directed towards the Ustahas and Domobrani at the head of the column, many other Serb fighters appeared to train their sights on the refugees. These insurgents

224 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 91.
immediately shot to death scores of Muslim civilians. In the chaos mothers were separated from their children. Many were killed running for cover. Children sat on the side of the road next to their dead or dying mothers, screaming and crying without any idea of what do to. All the while bullets flew around their heads.\textsuperscript{225} While they fired their rifles and machine guns at the defenseless Muslim civilians, some of the Serb insurgents could be heard yelling, “Fuck your Turkish mothers!”\textsuperscript{226}

At the head of the column, the Ustashas and Domobrani, led by Veber and Matijević, fought furiously and eventually managed to punch through the ambush. The Serb Communist commander Stevan Pilipović “Maćuka” was wounded during the battle, and, rather than be captured, committed suicide by pulling the pin on a hand grenade which he held to his chest.\textsuperscript{227} The Ustashas and Domobrani succeeded in bringing forward about 3,100 of the Muslim civilians, and they pressed on towards Vrtoče.\textsuperscript{228} Those who had not already been killed—about 2,000-2,200 of them—were now at the mercy of the insurgents who appeared to have continued massacring them even after the Ustashas and Domobrani had escaped.\textsuperscript{229} As one man who had been at the rear of the column described it when he arrived on the scene where most of the fighting had taken place:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 97; Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 1 and 5 October 2008 in Klisa.
\textsuperscript{226} Mušeta, \textit{Kulen Vakaf}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{227} Jovanić, \textit{Ratna sjećanja}, 125.
\textsuperscript{228} Bibanović, \textit{Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{229} On the insurgents continuing to shoot at the unarmed Muslim civilians after the battle ended, see Komanda 3. Žandarmerijske pukovnije Banja Luka Vrhovnoj komandi Žandarmerije NDH Zagreb, 12 September 1941, in Dedijer and Miletić, \textit{Genocid nad Muslimanim}, 66.
\end{quote}
For an entire kilometer I saw only dead bodies on the road…you could barely find a place to step where there were no bodies. The most were the elderly. And there were children who had been thrown into the canal. I remember one dead woman. A child was lying on her and was trying to nurse from her breast. A young boy, maybe fifteen or sixteen, his throat was cut, and under his throat they had shoved a washbowl. It was filled with blood which was spilling out on to the road.230

The precise number of Muslims whom the insurgents killed near Prkosi and Ćovka is impossible to determine due the chaotic nature of the battle that took place there. But, as Communist sources suggest, the number of victims was large. In reference to the battle, one report stated the following:

Our forces attacked and inflicted enormous losses. Our losses in these battles were not large. We lost five comrades and four were injured. The enemy lost so many that it was impossible to determine the exact number of dead and wounded. The battles were difficult and bloody as none that can be remembered.231

Eyewitness accounts from several insurgents indicated that around 300 Muslim civilians were killed during the battle. Others believed that the number of victims was somewhere between 350 to 500, with many others wounded.232

230 Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Ibrahim Kajan, “Pakao Vakuf Golubnjaća,” Ogledalo, Godina 1, Broj 2, prosinac/decembar 1990, 26. Other survivors reported seeing babies who were still alive trying to nurse from the breasts of their dead mothers. Interview with Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. See also Mušeta, Kulen Vakuf, 46-47.


232 Bibanović, Svedočanstvo jednog vremena, 97. For an Ustasha source on this phase of the massacre, which provides partial statistics on total number of victims, see Komanda 3. Žandarmerijske pukovnije Banja Luka o pokolju Muslimima Kulen Vakufa, 12. rujna 1941., in Tucakovic, Srpski zločini nad Bosnjacima-Muslimima, 194-196. See also Pilipović, “Borbap Cvjetničana na petrovačkom području,” 601, who argues that around 300 Muslims were killed. The Communist regime’s Land Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupier and its Collaborators in Bosnia and Herzegovina [Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača Bosne i Herzegovine], as well as its Federal Commission for all of Yugoslavia [Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača] did not conduct any systematic investigation of this massacre. However, the report on war crimes that the regional council of Kalati produced does mention these killings of Muslims. Moreover, it even cites the names of twenty five men, women and children from the villages of Klisa and Ostrovica who were killed, so it seems, in this first phase of the massacre near Prkosi and Ćovka. See AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 7.
The Muslims who managed to survive this massacre were then captured by insurgent units from a number of Serbian villages in the Kulen Vakuf region. For the group of Muslims who were captured near Dulidba, a spot not far from where the initial battle took place, the nightmare which had begun along the road was merely the beginning. Under the command of Mane Rovkić, the same commander who led the massacres on Croats a month earlier at Vrtoče and Krnjeuša, insurgents quickly began to divide up these surviving Muslim refugees. In their selections, they made no attempt to determine if any of the captured Muslims were Ustashas and if they were guilty of any crime. As Bećo Šiljdedić, one of the men who the insurgents captured at Dulidba, remembered:

The insurgents immediately divided the men on one side and the women and children on the other side. They tied our hands with rope and then took us towards Vrtoče. Along the way I could not dream of what was waiting for us. I prayed [out loud] to God to rescue us. Hearing my prayers, one insurgent struck me in the head so hard with the butt of his rifle that my head still hurts me today. They brought us to some pit at Dugopolje. Then we were made to take our clothes off. It was only at that point that I understood what was in store for us. The shooting and throwing of men into the pit began. Then my turn came. They fired a bullet at me. It went through my shoulder and part of my head but I could tell that it wasn’t enough to kill me. I fell into the pit. When I hit the bottom I could hear screams for help. One of the voices was familiar to me. It was Huse Galijašević from Kulen Vakuf. He asked me to take a knife and slit his throat because he couldn’t take the pain anymore. Beside his wounds from the gunshot, both of his legs were broken. More dead people were falling around us as we spoke, many of whom I recognized. There were more than seventy people in my group who were shot and thrown into the Dugopolje pit. I spent two days and two nights in the pit. Rain fell and I was wearing only my under shorts and shirt. I gathered my strength and with a great effort managed to pull myself out. I went towards Bihać. Not far from the pit I came across a [Serb] peasant who had a rogulj [a long metal rod for roasting meat]. To defend myself I picked up two rocks. He passed by me. He didn’t say a word.

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233 These villages included the following: Vrtoče, Bjelaj, Medenopoljski vod, Cvjetnić, Martin Brod, Očigrije, Prkosi, Stjenjani, Rajnovci, and Ćovka. See AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 7.

234 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 97.

235 Lukač, Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini, 192.
As the insurgents were murdering the last of the men at the Dugopolje pit, a number of their commanders, among them Communists, arrived to Dulidba. Their presence apparently brought the killings to halt. Several of them climbed up a small hillside and began to give a short speech to the captured Muslims. Smajo Vojić, a refugee from Orašac, was in the crowd. “They invited us to return peacefully to our houses and to continue to work our jobs. Some of those captured (i.e., the Muslims from Ćukovi and Orašac) said that they had nowhere to return to since their houses had already been burned. The insurgents replied that they would build them new and better houses.”

The brief speech drove home the immense differences which existed among the insurgents. On one hand, a large number of them had just spent the previous hours shooting to death perhaps as many as 500 innocent Muslim men, women and children who had been in the column, and then a smaller group had executed about seventy more at the Dugopolje pit. On the other, some of the insurgent commanders, who may have been unaware of the scope of these massacres, were now calmly telling the Muslims to return to their homes, almost as if no killings had taken place. The atmosphere could not have been more surreal.

While the terrified and shell-shocked Muslims listened to the insurgent commanders at Dulidba, Esad and Ibrahim Bibanović, and Džafer Demirović were still perched high in the minaret of the mosque in Kulen Vakuf, with their red flag draped along its side. They could now hear the insurgents in the hills. On several occasions they

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236 Šiljdedić recounted the names of nearly thirty Muslims who were murdered at the Dugopolje pit, including fathers and sons who the insurgents executed together. See in Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 97-98.

237 Ibid., 98-99.
called out to them to enter the town. Soon shooting started. As the three Muslim Communists climbed back down the spiral staircase, they could hear the bullets hitting the walls. Then, suddenly, the sounds stopped. They concluded that the insurgents had entered the town, and so they came down out of the mosque to greet them.

Three armed Serbs from the nearby village of Kalati approached them. They were dressed in black clothing and wore the caps of the old Yugoslav Army. Crisscrossed over their chests were bandoliers. They demanded to know why the men had stayed. The three Muslim Communists, who were holding rifles, replied: “To join you and to fight together against fascism!” In a matter of minutes many more insurgents arrived on the scene. While the Muslims tried to make small talk with the three insurgents from Kalati, a number of the others lunged at them, attempting to disarm them. As they struck the Muslim Communists, a number of the insurgents yelled out: “Fuck your Turkish mothers!” At this moment, several Serb Communists arrived and broke up the fight. They placed the Muslims under the protection of several other Communists and immediately sent them to their headquarters in Donji Lapac. As Esad Bibanović said after the war, had these Communists not intervened when they did, the insurgents would have mostly likely killed the three of them right there in front of the mosque. The incident vividly illustrated just how prevalent chauvinistic attitudes towards Muslims were among many of the insurgents. These three men—Communists

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239 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 91-92.

240 Ibid.

who had flown a red flag from the mosque and who wanted to fight with the Serb insurgents against all fascists—nearly lost their lives simply because they were Muslims.

8. The Sultan Ahmed mosque in Kulen Vakuf as seen in a photograph taken a few years before the start of the Second World War. The three Muslim Communists who remained in the town—Esad and Ibrahim Bibanović, and Džafer Demirović—were nearly killed in front of the archway at the base of the mosque by Serb insurgents on 6 September 1941. Source: Kreševljaković, Kulen Vakuf, 18

As more insurgents began to stream into Kulen Vakuf, Đoko Jovanić, the political commissar of the Second Battalion of the Drvar Brigade, arrived. He walked a bit around town, and even stepped inside a few houses noticing that “they were real Bosnian houses, clean and orderly. One could see that the residents had left only a little while before.”

242 Jovanić, Ratna sjećanja, 125
He saw how some of the Serb fighters were already starting to wander around town, looking for ways to enter the many stores and taverns. Immediately he ordered a special command to be set up which was composed of eight insurgents from Lika and eight from Bosnia. They were to guard the town and to keep anyone from entering it. A former gendarme from the village of Krško Brdo named Pero Đilas was the man he placed in charge of this unit. Đilas was not a Communist, nor was he known as a sympathizer of the Communist movement. He was apparently prone to violence and considered arrogant by those in the region who knew him. Like many other Serb insurgents, he viewed the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf as collectively responsible for mass killings which the Ustashas had carried out on Serbs in the region during the previous months. Đoko Jovanić, a Communist who came from Lika, was most likely unaware of the qualities of the man he had just selected to guard Kulen Vakuf.

Back on the hill near Dulidba, the insurgents received orders to escort the captured Muslims back to Kulen Vakuf. Broken up into smaller groups, the more than 2,000 Muslims began returning during the late afternoon and early evening to the town they had just fled. At the bridge on the Buk, with the Ustasha Miroslav Matijević’s house and tavern at their left, and the rushing Una directly below, the insurgents made another selection. All Muslim males twelve and older, of which there were about 400-420, were separated and taken to the center of Kulen Vakuf. They were held near the Ćaćić tavern which was located on the town square next to the mosque. Around 400 women and children were taken across the bridge at the Buk towards the gendarmerie station and held

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243 Ibid.

244 Reljić, “Martin Brod 1941. godine,” 403.
in a meadow nearby. The remaining 900 or so women and children were marched back towards town, and then around a kilometer past it in the direction of Martin Brod. The insurgents led them to a meadow not far from the Una. Their orders were to guard the Muslims until the next day when they would be escorted out of the valley.245

At this point, the situation was far from stable. Despite the veneer of order, a number of insurgents were combing through groups of refugees, looking for individuals to execute. The Croat Stipan Kovačević, who had protected a Serb child from the Ustasha for several months, was among the first they discovered. Several insurgents took the child away and then killed Kovačević along with his wife and two children.246

The insurgents discovered another Croat, Jakov Markovinović, among the refugees. His extended clan had its origins in the Croatian village of Boričevac, the first place the insurgents had attacked in early August, and known among the Serbs for the pit nearby where the Ustasha had murdered so many of their relatives and neighbors. The insurgents led him to the edge of the bridge on the Buk. There they cut his throat, and then dumped his body into the rushing water below. While the women and children crossed through Kulen Vakuf on the way to the meadow where they were to be held, they noticed the body of Bećo Mehadžić in a ditch by the side of the road. His head had been cut off. Apparently either on the bridge in Kulen Vakuf or at the Buk, insurgents led ten Muslim men to the edge, slit their throats, and then dumped their bodies into the Una. As the individual killings continued, the atmosphere of fear and panic grew. Several Muslim

245 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 100.

246 According to the Land Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupier and its Collaborators in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Stipan Kovačević had been a member of an Ustashi unit in the Kulen Vakuf region. See AJ, Fond DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javnio tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946, 1.
families tried to run away from the insurgents during the selections and the transport of
the groups of prisoners to new locations. They made it as far as the railroad tunnel at the
southern edge of Kulen Vakuf. There some Serb peasants found them and murdered
them.247

All these instances of killing demonstrated the degree to which the rank and file
insurgents behaved according to their own desire for revenge, often disobeying the direct
orders which their commanders gave. Here, their instructions were to escort the Muslims
back to Kulen Vakuf and guard them until the next day when they would all be taken out
of the valley. Instead, a number of the Serb peasant fighters were using the opportunity
to.execute their civilian prisoners. Other groups of Muslims, who were still far from
Kulen Vakuf as the sun began to set behind the mountains, were not spared this fate. The
insurgents guarding them decided that they would spend the night in the woods and then
walk back to town in the morning. Smajo Vojić, who had seen hundreds of dead bodies
on the road near Prkosi and Ćovka, and then listened to the surreal speech by the
insurgent commanders about how the Muslims should return to their homes as if the
killings had never taken place, remembered what happened next: “Night fell at Ćovka,
near Milota, and that’s where we slept. As soon as dusk fell, I sensed how our armed
escorts (i.e., the insurgents) were taking men away from my group into the forest and not
long after that shooting could be heard. Because of that I concluded they were killing
people. It was then that I decided to run.”248 Once again, the insurgent units behaved as

247 Ibid., pp. 100-101. The information on the killings of the Muslim men on the bridge in Kulen Vakuf or
at the Buk comes from ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 88, Svjedočenje Alitica Aijše i Kadića Zejne, undated
and handwritten document, most likely from the summer of 1946.

248 Ibid., 99.
they wished, and ignored their orders to protect the Muslims. The irony of the situation had a terrifying quality: those who posed the gravest threat to the Muslims were among those, and in significant numbers, who had been charged with guarding their lives. The dynamic of these killings appears to have had a spontaneous quality. At this point, it seems not to have been directed by authority figures, but rather began as ordinary peasant fighters selected Muslim prisoners to murder in order to take revenge.

While the insurgents were executing Muslim men in the forests near Ćovka, Pero Đilas and the sixteen guards under his command began to break into the taverns in Kulen Vakuf. The men helped themselves to bottles of wine and brandy and then started to force their way into the many stores and houses in town. Just as the insurgents had done two days before in Ćukovi and Orašac, they began to steal whatever they could. Any semblance of order and authority in Kulen Vakuf was slowly disintegrating as Đilas and his men drank and stole during the early evening hours. By this time, word had spread among most of the Serbian villages in the region that the insurgents had captured Kulen Vakuf. The Serbs who had survived the Ustasha massacres during the preceding months now grabbed axes, pitchforks, scythes, sticks, and whatever other items they had in their villages which could be used as weapons. They jumped on horses, or hitched them up to their carts. Bouncing along the bumpy roads, they raced towards Kulen Vakuf. Many

249 On the insurgents forcing their way into taverns and stealing from stores in Kulen Vakuf on the evening of 6 September 1941, see Žbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god. (Beograd: Vojno-istoriski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 42, “Izvještaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji,” undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, 134; See also, Danilo Damjanović-Danić, “Pad Kulen Vakufa,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga I (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 666; Đoko Jovanić argues that the guards under the command of Pero Đilas attempted but ultimately failed in preventing other insurgents, who had come down to Kulen Vakuf after the battles at Ćovka and Prkosi, from breaking into taverns and stores. See Jovanić, Ratna sjećanja, 126.
others simply walked. Among them were women, their hair tied back under handkerchiefs and their long skirts catching on the bushes as they briskly made their way down the wooded hills towards the town. As Gojko Polovina remembered: “These were the surviving fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends and neighbors of the Serbs who the Ustashas had brutally murdered.”250 Some were coming to plunder the town. But many more were coming because they heard the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf—who they saw collectively as Ustashas—were returning. What they wanted was revenge.

The furious Serb peasants began arriving at dusk. By this time some of Đilas’ men had apparently found a mass grave not far from the center where the Ustashas had dumped the bodies of some of the Serbs they had murdered during the month of August. They had not buried corpses very well and the smell was overpowering. As more and more Serb villagers arrived, they joined the insurgent guards in exhuming the remains. They dragged body after body from the mass grave and laid them out in front of it. The distraught Serb villagers walked among them, desperately trying to find their sons, brothers, fathers and other relatives.251 This traumatic experience aroused in many villagers a wild, uncontrollable desire for revenge and injected a strong element of chaos into the already highly unstable atmosphere.252

More insurgents came down from the hills and joined Đilas’ guards in drinking and stealing. They too saw the bodies of the Serbs that had just been exhumed and were

250 Polovina, Svjedočenje, 86-87.


252 Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god. (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 42, “Izvještaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji,” undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, 134.
filled with rage. A group of them, joined by many other Serb villagers, then walked back to the center of town where the Muslim men and boys were being held prisoner. Some of the insurgents circulated among them, screaming at them that they were all Ustashas, while stealing their clothing, watches, rings, and money.\(^{253}\) Apparently Đuro Štikovac, Pajica Očiguz and Jovo Keča were three who were highly active in this regard.\(^{254}\) Others spotted certain Muslims and called out, “this one is an Ustasha! He killed my brother and father.”\(^{255}\) It appears that there were several instances in which insurgents and Serb peasants dragged away some of the Muslim men who were being held near the tavern and killed them.\(^{256}\) The desire for revenge seemed to interlock with that for material gain; killing and stealing went hand-in-hand among many insurgents. As dusk turned to night, flames began to appear in Kulen Vakuf. Distraught villagers and furious insurgents had begun to set Muslim houses on fire.\(^{257}\)

Sometime after midnight, a drunken Pero Đilas apparently ordered that all the Muslim men and boys in the center of town be taken to Martin Brod. With the flames now jumping ever more quickly from house to house, the insurgents assembled their

\(^{253}\) Bibanović, *Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena*, 103.


\(^{256}\) *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.* (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 42, “Izvještaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji,” undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, 134.

prisoners in a long column, two men across. There were 400-420 of them. At around 4:00 AM under Pero Đilas’ order, the insurgents began marching the men and boys south out of town. They stopped briefly near the meadow a kilometer outside of Kulen Vakuf where the insurgents were holding about 900 Muslim women and children. None of the men dared to call out and speak with their wives, mothers, sisters and children. Shortly thereafter, the insurgents ordered them to begin marching. As night slowly turned to dawn, the hungry and thirsty Muslim men and boys began walking towards Martin Brod.258

9. The dirt road along which the insurgents led the Muslim men and boys from Kulen Vakuf to Martin Brod. Photograph taken by the author on 10 October 2008.

258 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 103.
At daybreak on 7 September, Đoko Jovanić, the Communist political commissar who had chosen Pero Đilas to command the insurgents charged with guarding Kulen Vakuf, awoke from his camp in the hills above the town. He gazed down and was shocked by what he saw.

From the top of Ljutica I could see Kulen Vakuf burning. It was difficult for my soul. Was this the battle for freedom that we desired? Why burn villages and towns? The peaceful and clean houses that I had walked around in the day before were burning before my eyes. Beside me was a fighter from the Beglučki unit, one of the best. I knew him and he was one of the most [politically] advanced. As I watched sadly as Kulen Vakuf disappeared into the flames, he said while cursing: “Last night we destroyed and ruined them, and this is real joy,” and then he pointed towards Vakuf. I was shocked. Even this man, who I felt was one of the most advanced, was talking this way. What could I then say about the rest? I was dejected and unhappy. I didn’t know what to do with myself.259

Gojko Polovina, who had left the region the previous day when the Ustashes launched an attack on the village of Cjepaćuše, also returned around the same time. He found Kulen Vakuf in a fire so fierce that, as he put it, “no one could put it out.”260

259 Jovanić, Ratna sjećanja, 127.

260 Polovina, Svjedočenje, 90.
10. View of Kulen Vakuf from the Ostrovica fortress. On the morning of 7 September 1941, Đoko Jovanić gazed down from a similar vantage point and saw nearly every structure on fire. Photograph by the author on 7 October 2008.

After having plundered the town and set it ablaze, drunken insurgents and furious peasants now turned their attention to the Muslim women and children. Serb men and women were apparently starting to creep closer and closer to the refugees who were being guarded in the meadow a kilometer outside of town, near the Una. As they viewed the Muslim men of Kulen Vakuf as all Ustashas, they considered these Muslim women and children to be nothing else but the families of the Ustashas. Some started to try and steal Muslim children out of the meadow in order to take them to the Una and drown them. It seems that Gojko Polovina was by now aware of the grave danger which the Muslim women and children faced, and gave the order for them to be taken to the nearby
village of Bjelaj. But he had great difficulty in obtaining horses and carts with which to transport them. Local Serb peasants had already stolen those which had belonged to the Muslims. Polovina requested assistance from Serbian villages near Donji Lapac, but instead of horses and carts he received this response: “When the Ustashas forced out the remaining Serb people from the villages around Slunj, Bihać and Kulen Vakuf towards us in free territory, those who were not able to move were immediately killed. And you are asking us to help transport the women and children of those murderers in our carts…!?”. With no help forthcoming, he had no choice but to send the Muslim women and children toward Bjelaj on foot.

As they were leaving Kulen Vakuf a large group of insurgents and peasants attacked them. Hana Štrkljević, who was with her children in this group, described what then happened:

Just as we were setting out we came across a group of about 200 insurgents and peasants who were armed with different kinds of weapons…rifles, axes, scythes, pitchforks, sticks. They were screaming and swearing at us. It was chaos. It was impossible to make sense of anything through the shooting, yelling, swearing, beating, and the crying of the children and the screaming of the women. Terrified of death, people ran in every direction. I went with a group of women and children towards the Una. Ten insurgents and peasants ran after us, cursing our Ustasha mothers, and yelling that all of us needed to be killed. When I heard that, I jumped into the river with my three children. So too did Zlata Kosović-Demirović with her two children. I don’t know how, but Zlata was somehow able to save herself, and she took me by the hand and pulled me out onto dry land, while one of my little girls was holding on to a branch in the water. When we found ourselves on the river bank it was only then that we saw that our children were not there, that is, my other two, and her two.

I realized that Zlata then lost her mind. With her soul in complete breakdown, she got a running start and jumped once again into the water. She was on the surface of the river only for a few seconds. I stayed with my daughter in the same place, not moving anywhere. I was completely out of my mind. I didn’t know what to do. Maybe I would have gone and done the same as Zlata had the insurgents and peasants not begun to chase me again.

261 Ibid., 91.
262 Ibid.
The night before the Muslims of the valley left for Bihać, the young boy Abas Mušeta remembered that his grandmother told him that if the Serbs attacked he was to go to the Una. He would be safe in the water because, she said, the Serbs could not swim. What was now unfolding on the bank of the river made her advice seem horribly perverse. Serb men and women, armed with axes and scythes and other farm tools, chased the Muslim women and children in all directions. They sliced the throats and stabbed the chests of those they caught. There were scenes of mothers lying on the ground, like Ajša Galijašević, their throats slit, with their babies and small children who the Serbs had not bothered to kill crawling around their lifeless bodies. More and more distraught Muslim women, with nowhere else to go, ran towards the Una. Like Hana Štrkljević and Zlata Kosović-Demirović, they too decided to jump into the river with their children rather than let them fall into the hands of the raging Serb peasants and insurgents. None could swim. Their bodies bobbed on the surface for a few seconds before the rushing water sucked them under. Other Muslim women ran to the river’s edge but could not bring themselves to jump into the water with their children. Apparently there were instances in which enraged Serb women found them there, trapped and frozen in place on

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265 Interview with Mujo Demirović on 30 September 2008 in Bihać; Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Mehmed Štrkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. See also Demirović, *Bosna i Bošnjaci u srpskoj politici*, 274. The Communist regime’s State Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupier and its Collaborators did not conduct any systematic investigation of these killings of Muslim women and children in Kulen Vakuf. However, the report on war crimes which the regional council of Kalati produced does specifically mention these instances in which Muslim women threw their children and themselves into the Una rather than be massacred by the Serbs who were chasing them. Moreover, it even cites the names of thirteen women and children who died this way, who were between four and forty-nine years of age. See AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 7.
the river bank, and then pushed them in to drown like the rest. Other Serb women were revolted at the idea that some of the Muslim women might survive after jumping into the water, and yelled out: “Don’t let the Muslims jump, don’t let them save themselves!” These women picked up stones and hurled them at their helpless victims who were trapped by the water or beat them with sticks. The killing in the meadows and next to the Una went on for hours.

Around a kilometer away, at another meadow next to the gendarmerie station not far from the bridge by the Buk, Serb insurgents and peasants attacked the smaller group of around 400 Muslim women and children. Once again, the enraged Serbs killed without mercy using knives, axes, and whatever other farm tools they had brought from their villages. The Muslim women ran in all directions with their children. Some fled to the nearby bridge over the Buk and, trapped by Serbs advancing from both sides, threw themselves and their children into the water where they drowned. Others ran to the nearby cornfields to hide. There, huddled together with their sons and daughters, they attempted to stay as quiet as possible. The silence was punctuated every few minutes by the screams of women and children as the Serbs found them and killed them. Often the screaming would drag on and on indicating that the Serb men were raping the Muslim women. One story about the atrocities in the cornfields that circulated after the war was

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266 Interviews with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo; Anonymous informant on 24 September 2008.


268 Interview with Bećo Pehlivanović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać.

269 The participation by women in committing acts of mass violence is a topic that has not drawn much attention from researchers. For a short discussion of the history of women and their participation in killing, see Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 294-333.
about a Serb fighter from Martin Brod named Rade Medić “Pitar.” He apparently roamed through the fields with two other Serbs until they come across a woman who was crouched down. She was sheltering her twins. Pitar towered above her, standing taller than the corn stalks. They tossed the children aside and began raping her. Two would hold her down while the other assaulted her. Then they would switch places and continue. When they finished, they took her twins and threw them in the Una where they drowned. Apparently some other Serbs eventually took the woman to the village of Očijevo where scores of other men raped her.²⁷⁰

11. View of the Una River from the bridge which spans the Buk. Muslim women threw their children and themselves from this height into the rushing water, with most later drowning, rather than be murdered by

²⁷⁰ Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 32; Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 and 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; On the raping of Muslim women, especially very young girls, see Mušeta, Kulen Vakuf, 48. Očijevo was a Serb village where, according to Arthur Evans, Muslim bašibozuks raped Orthodox women and girls during the rebellion of 1875-1878. If this story about the Muslim woman being raped there by Serbs in 1941 is true, it may have been revenge for what happened during the rebellion.
the Serb insurgents and peasants who had surrounded them. Photograph taken by the author on 27 September 2008.

In the midst of the killing and raping, Serb Communists and other insurgents and local peasants who opposed the mass murder of their innocent Muslim neighbors tried desperately to save as many lives as possible. Some Serb insurgents ran and physically stopped other Serbs from murdering Muslim women and children in the meadows around Kulen Vakuf.\(^{271}\) Some of those who felt compelled to intervene did so because they owed their lives to certain Muslims who had saved them earlier in the summer from the Ustashas. They shouted at the insurgents and peasants who were killing: “Listen! Let him go. This is a good person, he saved me!”\(^{272}\) A number of insurgents managed to gather together several hundred Muslim women and children and led them to the old gendarmerie station near the Buk. They stood guard and refused to let any other revenge-seeking insurgents and peasants touch them.\(^{273}\) On several occasions furious Serbs approached the building and demanded that those guarding the Muslims leave so that they could set the building on fire with the women and children inside. But the Serbs at the entrance refused.\(^{274}\)

\(^{271}\) Interview with Đula Seferović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.


\(^{273}\) Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

\(^{274}\) Interview with Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
12. View of the old gendarmerie station located near the Buk in Kulen Vakuf. Now a ruin and overgrown with trees, this was where Serb insurgents protected hundreds of Muslim women and children from other insurgents and peasants who wished to murder them. Photograph taken by the author on 5 October 2008. Other local Serbs, whose long-standing ties of friendship with Muslims in the region had not been severed by the extreme violence, took in terrified Muslim women and children or showed them where to run to safety, thereby saving their lives.275 Hana Štrkljević, the woman who had jumped into the Una with Zlata Kosović-Demirović, was one such individual. After she lost two of her children in the Una, furious Serb peasants began chasing her once again. As she remembered:

Running from them for the second time, I somehow managed to get to the road after running through a cornfield, and then went in the direction of Martin Brod. At the Šolić house I came across a peasant who began beating me on my back with a stick. If Milan

275 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać; Mehmed Štrkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Kemal Štrkljević on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Svetozar Tankosić on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod. See also Danilo Damjanović-Danić, “Pad Kulen Vakufa,” 666.
Karanović from Očijevo had not arrived at that point, the peasant would have killed me for sure. He protected me and took me to Martin Brod. He put me in Marko Vladetić’s house. Even though the Ustashas had killed two of his sons, he and his daughter treated me and my daughter as if they were our father and sister.276

In this case, Serbs were responsible for the death of two of Hana’s children and had nearly killed her; at the same time, other Serbs were responsible for saving her life and that of her surviving daughter.

The saving of Muslim women and children went on at the same time as the killing and raping of them. But there were simply more Serbs seeking revenge than those ready to defend their Muslim neighbors. Moreover, those who sought to save Muslims very quickly came into heated exchanges and sometimes even exchanged blows with those who were intent on slaughtering them. As the insurgent commander Nikola Karanović remembered: “We tried to bring about some order and to protect the people, at least the women and children, but it was very difficult to do. The danger existed that fighting would soon break out among the insurgents, as those who opposed the taking of revenge were called traitors of the Serb people.”277 It appears that a majority of the insurgents willingly participated in the score settling with the peasants who had come down from the hills once they heard Kulen Vakuf had fallen. As Đoko Jovanić recalled: “The consciousness of the fighters and the people was nearly identical.”278 These “furious

276 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 101. The story of Hana Štrkljević and the Serbs that saved her life is also briefly mentioned in Puškar, Krajiški pečat, 97.

277 Karanović, “Sadjejestvo sa ličkim ustanicima,” 413.

278 Jovanić, Ratna sjećanja, 128.
masses” of Serb peasants—including men and women—as well as the insurgents were, according to Karanović, “looking for revenge at any price.”

As the sun began to set on 7 September 1941, the devastating results of their vengeance were coming into focus. Of the nearly 1,300 women and children who had been returned to Kulen Vakuf after the initial massacre near the Serbian villages of Ćovka and Prkosi, more than 900 had been killed. Their bodies lay dead in the cornfields and meadows near the town, and many others had already been swept away in the rushing waters of the Una. Besides the several hundred women and children who Serbs had saved at the gendarmerie station by the Buk and in other individual instances, others had somehow managed to escape the killings on their own. One group was huddled together above the town in the old Ottoman fortress called Havala, located on top of a hill on the Bosnian side of the Una, directly across from the much larger fortress in Ostrovica which dominates the heights. Sometime during the morning on 8 September, the insurgents found them. They told them they would escort them to the village of Bjelaj. The terrified women and children agreed to go. Fata Hodžić-Selimović was among the prisoners as they walked toward Bjelaj.

I saw lots of dead men, women and children when we passed through Prkosi who the peasants had gathered together, most likely to bury them somewhere. At the Ešanović forest, we turned right from the road. When we had walked around two kilometers from the road into the forest, the insurgents who were taking us stopped us at a pit. Then they took out axes and began hitting heads and throwing bodies into the pit. Children were screaming for help at the top of their lungs, and women were shrieking. It was terrible! A girl from Kulen Vakuf and I were the last. We were cut above the eyes by the edge of the axe, but we came back to consciousness relatively quickly. I spent three days in the pit and then somehow I managed to pull myself out. I went to Bjelaj, the village where I was born.

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279 Karanović, “Sadještvo sa ličkim ustanicima,” 413.

280 Testimony of Fata Hodžić-Selimović in Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 102.
As the insurgents murdered the last of the remaining women and children in and around Kulen Vakuf on the morning of 8 September, the fate of the men and boys who had marched to Martin Brod the previous day was about to be determined. They had arrived the previous morning and were taken to a spot near the train station next to Marko Vladetić’s house, the same man who had taken in Hana Štrkljević and her daughter. The insurgents had selected three Muslim men, Džafer Mušeta, Hamdija Kulenović-Bajbutović, and Hamdija Kulenović-Ćouvka, to help them establish which men among the prisoners were Ustashas. The three determined that eleven were guilty, among them Džafer’s father. The insurgents sentenced them to death.


But not long after this improvised “trial” took place, Pero Đijlas suddenly arrived on a white horse. He shouted out to the other insurgents and Serb peasants who were
guarding the prisoners: “They should all be killed! No one should be left alive. They are all Ustashas!”281 The Serb Communist Ranko Šipka apparently condemned Đilas’ order and demanded that the insurgents ignore it. But the local Serbs ignored him. It appears they had more respect for Đilas and understood his statement as a direct order.282 In addition, it is likely that his order corresponded with the strong desire for revenge that many insurgents had. Apparently Marko Vladetić then tried to convince Đilas to free some of the Muslims. It seems that Đilas gave this idea some thought with regard to the handful of Muslims who he believed had enough money to pay for their lives. But ultimately he let none go. Vladetić, his wife, and their daughter-in-law then took matters into their own hands and tried to help some of the Muslims escape. However, the insurgents saw what they were doing and beat all three. The guards then began to make preparations to carry out Đilas’ orders.283 They bound their prisoners’ wrists with wire and then took more and tied the Muslim men and boys to each other. Not long after, they began marching the Muslims in groups of around twenty out of Martin Brod up into the hills. Their destination was a place less than two kilometers outside of the village where there was a deep pit. It was called Golubnjača, “the Pigeon Cave”.284

Unlike the pit that the Ustashas had used to kill Serbs near Boričevac, Golubnjača was known to many Serb peasants in the region. As Gojko Polovina recalled:

281 Bibanović, “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustaniku,” 452; See also the testimony of Hana Štrkljević in Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 102.

282 Ibid., 105

283 Polovina, Svjedočenje, 92.

284 Ibid., 103.
That pit—Golubnjača—is the symbol among us of terrible tales and a monument of a bloody past. As children, for every mischievous act we feared the words: “If you’re not good, we’ll throw you into Golubnjača.” I was still a child when our neighbor, grandma Milica, “explained” what Golubnjača was. “Golubnjača, my children, that’s a pit which is bottomless, infinite, that God created so that devils, vampires and witches could be imprisoned inside so that they would not be able to attack the people. At the entrance of the pit God placed angels in the form of pigeons which stop the devils, vampires and witches from coming outside and attacking the people. But at night, when the pigeon angels sleep, the devils, vampires and witches come out, and they go around searching for victims. It is only when dawn comes that the pigeon angels force them once again into the pit. There, that’s Golubnjača.”

While still a young boy, Polovina asked his grandfather if such mystical stories were true. He replied: “What kind of devils, what kind of witches!? In Golubnjača there are the bones of rebels who were killed without trial and outside the law. They threw them into Golubnjača so that no one would know where their graves are. It’s forbidden to speak about this…”

This second description is what the Serb insurgents had in mind as they led the more that 400 Muslim men and boys up hills towards Golubnjača. As they walked, the Serbs demanded that the Muslims sing Serbian songs and shout at the top of their lungs “Long Live King Petar!” They sang and shouted. The column made its way out of the valley and then began passing through orchards of plum trees. Among the prisoners was Mujo Dervišević from the village of Klisa.

Group by group they led us, in groups of around sixteen to twenty. Around seven to eight groups went before mine. None of us had any idea where we were going. When my group’s turn came, and when we arrived at the Golubnjača pit, it was only then that we realized what was happening. People were killed with axes, butcher’s knives, short scythes, and then thrown half alive into the pit. About five to six men carried out the killings, while around ten were standing guard. I came to the edge of the pit. One of them asked me if I had anything on me. Then he said, “Fuck your Turkish mother, they already took everything from you!” When it came time for me to be killed, I got my

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285 Ibid., 91.
286 Ibid., 91-92.
287 Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Bibanović, Svojdočanstvo jednog vremena, 103.
hands free from the wire and ran with all of my strength.\textsuperscript{289} One of them, whose voice was familiar to me, yelled out: “Mujo is running away, fuck his mother!” And they started shooting at me. They chased me on the steep slope, but by then I was already in the thick forest. I heard them say: “He’s wounded, let’s go back, he’ll die soon.”\textsuperscript{290} From that spot, which was around one hundred meters from Golubnjača, I watched as they continued to bring men, kill them, and then throw them into the pit. The screaming of the men could be heard loudly and clearly. This lasted for an hour and a half after my escape. After the last group had been liquidated, I heard some of the killers say loudly, “let’s go, we’ve finished our job!” They then left for Martin Brod, singing as they walked.\textsuperscript{291}

Out of the 400-420 men and boys who the insurgents brought from Kulen Vakuf to Martin Brod, Mujo Dervišević was the only who escaped. The insurgents murdered the rest, dropping their bodies into the darkness of the deep pit. Like the Ustasha massacres of Serbs earlier in the summer, the intimacy of the killing at Golubnjača was striking. The insurgent who spotted Dervišević making his escape recognized him and called out his first name, while he instantly knew the voice of the insurgent. Dervišević was soon caught by several Serb fighters. Their commander, Đuro Rašeta, confirmed that he was not an Ustasha, and then sent him on to the Serb Communists in Drvar. They implored Dervišević to join them and fight. He told them that he had no idea where his wife and six children were, and that he needed to go and find them. Just before he left, one Communist offered the following advice: “Don’t go to [Kulen] Vakuf. Everything there has been burned to the ground. Not even a cat has been left alive.”\textsuperscript{292}

\textsuperscript{288} Kajan, “Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača,” 27.

\textsuperscript{289} Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Bibanović, \textit{Svјedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 103.

\textsuperscript{290} Kajan, “Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača,” 27.

\textsuperscript{291} Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Bibanović, \textit{Svјedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 103-104.

\textsuperscript{292} Kajan, “Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača,” 27.
5. Primary locations of mass killings of Muslims, 6-8 September 1941. Source: Drawn by the author.
IV. The Aftermath

Approximately 5,600 Muslims, and a handful of Croats, left Kulen Vakuf for Bihać on 6 September 1941. The Ustasha authorities in Bihać reported that about 3,000-3,100 had arrived. Among them was Miroslav Matijević and most of his Ustashas, the men who

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293 Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 107. Bibanović found an Ustasha document in the Museum of the Una-Sana Canton (in Bihać) in which the Ministry of the Croatian Homeguards [Ministarstvo
had unleashed the initial wave of mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region earlier in the summer. Of the remaining 2,500, it appears that Serb Communists, non-Communist insurgents, and Serb peasants managed to save about 500, the vast majority of them women and children. The rest—nearly 2,000—disappeared between 6-8 September. During this roughly forty-eight hour period, Serb insurgents and peasants—including both men and women—murdered these unarmed and innocent Muslim men, women and children in multiple locations and in cold blood, usually not with firearms but with farm tools. They set fire to Kulen Vakuf which burned the entire town to the ground. Ever since the town had been built in the beginning of the eighteenth century, floods and fire had caused regular and significant damage. But never had any natural disaster obliterated Kulen Vakuf as ferociously and completely as the Serb insurgents and local peasants did in early September 1941. Every single house and structure, including the Sultan Ahmed mosque built by King Mahmut Kulenović, was gone. So too were all the residents. Many were now in Bihać and would soon be scattered as refugees to other Bosnian towns and cities like Bosanski Novi, Prijedor, Banja Luka, Derventa, and Sarajevo. The rest had been murdered. Their bodies lay in deep pits, strewn in meadows and cornfields, and washed down the crystal clear waters of the Una.²⁹⁴

Gojko Polovina, the political commissar of the Second Battalion of the Drvar Brigade, had watched in dismay as Kulen Vakuf burned down, and had done what he
could to save as many Muslim women and children as possible. On 8 September, word reached him that Serb insurgents had murdered the Muslim men and boys who Pero Đilas had ordered to march to Martin Brod. He immediately found a motorcycle and rode as fast as he could to Golubnjača.

I got off the motorcycle and went down to the pit. Around the entrance I saw fresh tracks. It was obvious that those who carried out this crime had tried to cover their tracks, as they had turned over the first layer of earth around the pit and had washed the traces of blood away from the rocks. Nothing else could be seen. There were not even any pigeons.\(^{295}\)

He then went to Martin Brod and began asking the local villagers questions about what happened. They told him that Pero Đilas had brought a large group of prisoners from Kulen Vakuf. Insurgents from the nearby villages of Doljani, Cvjetnić, Brotinja, Očijevo, as well as several others, had apparently argued with Đilas about how to divide up the money and other items which they had stolen from the Muslims. They then took the men and boys to Golubnjača and killed them.\(^{296}\)

With this information, Polovina, as well as a handful of other insurgent commanders, then prepared a series of reports on what had happened in the Ljutoč valley for the main command of the Drvar Brigade. They did not mince words about how the attack on the Ustashas in the valley ultimately resulted in the mass killing of large numbers of innocent Muslims. “Drunk and furious people behaved towards them [the Muslims] in a wild way,” which ultimately resulted in “horrible chaos and many innocent victims.”\(^{297}\) It is significant that as early as a few days after the massacres, these

\(^{295}\) Polovina, *Svjedočenje*, 92.

\(^{296}\) Ibid.

\(^{297}\) *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.* (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 42, “Izvještaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-
Communists acknowledged to their commanders that the victims were not Ustashas or Ustasha collaborators, but rather “innocent victims.” For them, it was clear that a serious war crime had taken place against the civilian non-combatant population. However, aside from naming Pero Đilas as the man who had ordered the Muslim men and boys to be taken to Martin Brod, Polovina and his comrades did not assign direct responsibility to any specific insurgents or their commanders for any of the killings. The abstract category of “drunk and furious people” appeared as the sole main guilty party in their reports for what happened in and nearby Kulen Vakuf.

The Communist leadership in Drvar, shocked and dismayed by the events of 6-8 September 1941, issued a stern and angry response:

We received your exhaustive report about the battles around Kulen Vakuf and Dulidba and about the results of those battles. The history of Borićevec has been repeated. Our units—which went into battle with the will and excitement to fight for the freedom of their lands, their towns and villages—are burning those same towns and villages. These same units, which have fought against the bloody terror of Pavlić’s bands (i.e., the Ustashas)…have shown themselves to be weak in preventing irresponsible elements from plundering and burning Kulen Vakuf. We trust that every one of our respectable guerillas will condemn the burning and plunder of Kulen Vakuf, and the killing of innocent men, women and children. We also trust that in our future battles our respectable guerillas will prevent these crimes at all costs.298

Several Serb insurgent commanders, including Nikola Karanović, later acknowledged that their superiors stressed to them privately in the strongest possible language that similar errors could never be allowed to be repeated. “I remember very well,” Karanović later wrote, “how it was said that the taking of Kulen Vakuf brought more damage than

use. Because of this we were deeply disappointed for a long time.”299 Đoko Jovanić, who had also watched as Kulen Vakuf burned to the ground, spoke to Gojko Polovina about what had happened and named Pero Đilas and other “Greater Serb elements” as the guilty parties for the killing of the Muslims. The two apparently agreed that they would conduct an investigation in order to find those who were guilty and to severely punish them. They even apparently suggested this to the main command of the Drvar Brigade.300 No direct documentation exists which confirms their plan, nor any response from their superiors about it.

In the end, no such investigation was conducted into the massacres of innocent Muslims in and around Kulen Vakuf, and the plunder and burning of the town. The position of the Communists in the insurgency was far too weak in September 1941 to carry out what would have been an extremely sensitive inquiry. Doing so would have risked alienating large numbers of insurgents at a time when the Communists lacked sufficient authority over them. Clearly illustrating the frailty of the Communist leadership in the aftermath of the massacres were several things that Esad Bibanović, one of the three Muslim Communists from Kulen Vakuf, saw and heard once he and his brother Ibrahim and Džafer Demirović arrived in Donji Lapac. While being held in a room, a Serb insurgent came in and approached Demirović. He then grabbed the Muslim Communist by the hair and told him that he had killed his entire family. Others apparently had to pull the man away. It was at this point that Bibanović finally realized

299 Karanović, “Sadjejstvo sa ličkim ustačicima,” 413.

300 Jovanić, Ratna sjećanja, 128.
the full extent of the danger that the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf and the rest of the Ljutoč valley had been in with regard to the Serb insurgents. 301

Later, Rade Žigić, a Serb Communist commander of the insurgents from Croatia, asked Bibanović and the others if they wanted to fight against fascism. They said yes. Žigić then told them that they would all have to adopt Serbian pseudonyms in order to avoid further conflicts with other insurgents. From that point on, Esad become known as “Mile,” short for the Serbian name “Milan.” Later, while traveling towards Korenica (located in present-day Croatia), Žigić told the three Muslim Communists that Kulen Vakuf had been burned to the ground and then he briefly alluded to the massive loss of life. They asked him why the Communists had been unable to stop the violence and destruction. Appearing somewhat upset by their question, Žigić simply replied: “There was nothing that could have been done!” 302

These incidents revealed the degree to which the Communists were operating from a position of grave weakness in terms of authority over the Serb insurgents. That one of them would attack Demirović, telling him that he had killed his entire family; that the three Muslims had to adopt Serbian names to ensure their own safety among the Serb insurgents; and that Žigić would tell them that “nothing could have been done” to stop the massacres of so many innocent Muslim civilians—all these instances vividly conveyed not only the considerable limits of Communist authority over the insurgency, but exemplified just how much hatred existed among large numbers of the Serb

301 Bibanović, Sjedocanstvo jednog vremena, 113.
302 Ibid.
insurgents towards Muslims.\textsuperscript{303} Illustrating this dynamic even more starkly was what happened to the insurgent Pero Điljas in the days following the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf. Điljas had personally ordered the murder of over four hundred Muslim men and boys at the Golubnjača pit on 8 September. Despite the apparent disgust of Communist commanders with the massacres, Điljas received no punishment. Instead, on 10 September, two days after the end of the massacres, he was actually promoted to the position of commander of the second battalion of the Drvar Brigade, that is, of the units which carried much of the mass killing between 6-8 September.\textsuperscript{304} This detail, perhaps more than any other, illustrates the extent to which the Communists in the late summer of 1941 were prepared to rely on perpetrators of mass violence against Muslims in order to continue the fight against the Ustasha and other occupying armies. As proponents of a future multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina in which all nationalities would be equal, their alliance early in the war with insurgents guilty of murdering innocent Muslims was indeed Faustian.

The massacres of Muslim civilians in and around Kulen Vakuf were not isolated instances of a handful of renegade and hate-filled insurgents ignoring their commanders and committing atrocities. They were part of a broader trend which unfolded during the first months of the insurgency in other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina where Serb

\textsuperscript{303} On the very cold reception that Muslims received when they tried to join the insurgents, including instances in which insurgents killed such Muslims (e.g., in Nevesinje, Suva, and Velika Kladuša), see Hurem, \textit{Križa Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine}, 41. In some cases, Serb insurgents demanded that insurgents who they did not know drop their pants and show whether or not they were circumcised. When they discovered Muslims, they killed them, including Muslim members of the Communist Party. On this point, see Tucaković, \textit{Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima}, 24-25. On the imperative for Muslims who sought to join the insurgents to adopt Serbian names in order to protect themselves, see Lukač, \textit{Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini}, 194.

\textsuperscript{304} Bibanović, “Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” 453.
insurgents carried out mass killings of Muslim civilians. These killings were just as ferocious in method as what happened in Kulen Vakuf, but less extensive in scale. For example, Serb insurgents murdered between forty to fifty Muslims in Avtovac, perhaps as many as 400-700 in the Bileća region in Herzegovina, and an undermined but apparently sizable number in Kalinovnik and Kladenj, to cite but a handful of cases. 305 In other instances, Communists decided against attacking certain towns and villages, such as Bosanska Dubica, out of fear that the insurgents would massacre the Muslim inhabitants after defeating the Ustasha. 306 The weakness of the Communist leadership over the insurgents was therefore not limited merely to the Kulen Vakuf region; this was a problem that hindered the Communists in a number of regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summer and fall of 1941.

The appearance of the Chetniks during the same period, and especially in the months after the massacres in Kulen Vakuf, added yet another element to the general crisis which the Communist leadership faced in trying to control the Serb insurgents, and mold them into a guerrilla army. The Chetniks were loosely organized groups of Serb nationalist insurgents. 307 Often commanded at the local level by former members of the gendarmerie, elements from the pre-war political classes, and merchants, they were officially under the leadership of Dragoljub Mihajlović, a former colonel in the Yugoslav

305 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH RO, Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 4-5; Tucaković, Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima, 24-25; Odmetnička zvjerstva i pustošenja u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj u prvim mjesecima života Hrvatske Narodne Države, 86.

306 Hurem, Kriza Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine, 35; See also Lukač, Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini, 269, for examples of insurgent units that murdered Muslims in the villages they attacked.

307 The Chetnik movement had a long tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the number of local organizations was on the rise in the years leading up the Second World War. On the history of the Chetniks in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the Second World War, see Šešić, Četništvo u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1918-1941.
Army from Serbia. He sought to restore the Serbian monarchy to power in a postwar Yugoslavia, which he hoped would be state for all Serbs. Mihajlović and the rest of the Chetnik leadership saw the war as an opportunity to radically reconfigure the national composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the two Bosnian Serb Chetnik leaders Boško Todorović and Sergije Mihailović said in 1941: “The sacred hour has come to cleanse forever all of the non-national elements and enemies of the Serb people.”

Throughout the second half of 1941, as well as during the winter and spring of 1942, Serb Chetniks unleashed a massive wave of violence, murdering thousands of unarmed Muslim men, women and children. Some appear to have been driven by a long-term desire to destroy once and for all their Muslim neighbors. This sensibility had its roots in what some Serbs perceived as an eternal struggle against Muslims in order to shake off what they viewed as the “Turkish yoke” which had remained in Bosnia from the period of Ottoman rule. Others sought revenge for the massacres which Muslim Ustashas had committed against Serbs earlier in the summer. Still others, like many of the Croats and Muslims who joined the Ustashas, became Chetniks because of the unexpected opportunity to enrich themselves by plundering and killing their neighbors, or to settle personal scores with their neighbors. The scale of the Chetnik killings was most

308 Tucaković, Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima, 38.
309 Ibid.
310 Dulić, Utopias of Nation, 118.
intense in eastern Bosnia, where the movement was strongest due to the proximity of the border with Serbia and the ease with which Chetniks from Serbia infiltrated into the region.\textsuperscript{311} There were also numerous massacres which Chetniks, or Serb insurgents under the command of Chetniks, carried out in Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{312} The killings unfolded in ways similar to the massacres in Kulen Vakuf. In many cases, both Communist and Chetnik commanders were attempting to direct the Serb insurgents.\textsuperscript{313} When they attacked Muslim villages under the control of the Ustaschas, the Chetniks, as well as some of the non-Chetnik insurgents, took revenge by murdering Muslim civilians. Communist commanders, who by late summer and early fall 1941 began to refer to their insurgent units as "Partisans" [\textit{Partizani}], deplored and heavily criticized these acts of mass killing.\textsuperscript{314} Nevertheless, they still continued collaborating with the Chetniks against the Ustaschas until early November 1941, and some even for a while after.

Around this time the Partisan leadership began to distance itself more vigorously from the Chetniks, as the mass killings which they continued to commit were destroying any chance of mobilizing Muslims into the Partisan movement. Chetnik commanders

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\textsuperscript{311} Between December 1941 and January 1941, the Chetniks murdered more than 2,000 Muslims in the Drina Valley in eastern Bosnia, with the vast majority of killings carried out in the towns of Foča and Goražde. On these killings, see Dedijer and Miletic, \textit{Genocid nad Muslimanima}, 61-160; On Chetnik war crimes in Foča, see Faruk Muftić, \textit{Foča. Ponovljeni zločin} (Sarajevo: "DES", 2001), 36-177. Dragoljub Mihajlović was eventually sentenced to death by the post-war Communist regime. On his fate, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 824, Vrhovni sud Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije—Vojno veće, Suđenje Dragoljuba-Draže Mihajlović i drugih, 31 May-1 June 1946 and 10-11 June 1946, 1-18.

\textsuperscript{312} One of the most notorious was the murder of Muslims at the pit in Čavkarica, where nearly 500 Muslims were killed. On this massacre, see Tahir Pervan, \textit{Čavkarica. Vrata pakla} (Sarajevo: Zonex ex Libris, 2006).


\textsuperscript{314} Lukač, \textit{Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini}, 155-156. According to Lukač, it appears that a number of units decided on the name "Partisans" [\textit{Partizani}] by 21 August 1941.
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then ordered their forces to begin attacking the Partisans whom they saw as their main rivals in the power struggle for leadership of a post-war Yugoslav state, and whom they deplored for championing a multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina. This started an open war between the two predominately Serb insurgent forces, and brought a temporary halt to the mass killing of Muslims as the Chetniks directed the bulk of their attention to attempting to liquidate the Partisans. The outbreak of the conflict prompted many Serb Partisans to switch sides towards the end of 1941 and join the Chetniks. They did so in order to continue with “the killing of Turks,” the group many Serb insurgents still viewed as their main enemy.\footnote{Josip Broz Tito, the Partisan leader, apparently stated this in a letter sent to Vladimir Zečević in January 1942. See Tucaković, \textit{Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima}, 33. On the split between the Partisans and the Chetniks in the wider region in which the Kulen Vakuf region was located, see Dušan Lukač, “Četnička izdaja u Bosanskoj Krajini 1941. godine i u prvoj polovini 1942. godine,” \textit{Zbornik kraljaških muzeja. Banja Luka, Bihać, Drvar, Jajce, Prijedor}, I, 1962.} This desire for revenge often greatly outstripped any political loyalty the insurgents might have felt for the Partisans, who many had joined simply because it was the first resistance movement to materialize in a number of regions.\footnote{Hurem, \textit{Križa Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine}, 71.}

There were numerous instances towards the end of 1941 and in the beginning of 1942 in which entire units of Partisans simply left in the middle of the night and went over to join the Chetniks.\footnote{Tucaković, \textit{Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima}, 32.}

While the Partisan commanders were now engaged in fighting both the Ustashas and Chetniks, they increasingly turned their attention to carrying out intensive political work among their rank and file. Their main task was to stress as much as possible that Serbs, Muslims and Croats needed to fight together in order to defeat the Axis occupiers and their domestic collaborators (i.e., the Ustashas and the Chetniks). The Partisan
leadership repeated again and again to their predominately Serb fighters that these were their real enemies, not “the Turks.” Activists specifically stressed that all Muslims were not Ustasha, and they ordered their rank and file to begin protecting Muslim villages from the Chetniks.\textsuperscript{318} A number of Serb Communist Party members, especially those who had lost relatives in massacres which the Ustasha committed, played a key role in stressing to the Partisan rank and file that it was the Ustasha who were guilty, not all Muslims and Croats.\textsuperscript{319}

Despite this intensive political work, the Partisans continued to struggle with containing the chauvinistic views of their own rank and file. In the Kulen Vakuf region, Serb insurgents murdered the entire family of the well-known Croat communist Jozo Hodak.\textsuperscript{320} In the Podgrmeč region, located east of Kulen Vakuf, Serb Partisans with sympathies to the Chetniks tried to kill Muslims and Croats who had recently joined them. At the end of 1941, some local Partisan commanders could still be heard saying that they believed the main objective of the insurgency was to fight against the Muslims whom they saw as collectively guilty for the crimes of the Ustasha. It was thought that between thirty to fifty percent of the Partisan rank and file in the Bosnian Krajina, the wider area in which the Kulen Vakuf region was located, were of a Chetnik orientation. These men shunned collaboration with Muslims and Croats, and continued to murder them and steal their property.\textsuperscript{321} It was therefore hardly a surprise that many Muslims

\textsuperscript{318} Hurem, \textit{Kriza Narodooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine}, 95. On this work in the Bihać region, see Mile Bursać, „Razvijanje oružanog bratstva i jedinstva,” in Bihać u novoj istoriji (1918-1945) \textit{Tom II} (Banjaluka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1987), 386.

\textsuperscript{319} Lukač, \textit{Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini}, 307.

\textsuperscript{320} Bibanović, \textit{Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena}, 110.
continued to view the Partisans as an “army of revenge” [osvetnička vojska], whose fighters were essentially interested in killing Muslims. Refugees from Kulač Vukuf, who had fled in the aftermath of the September 1941 massacres to the town of Cazin, not surprisingly warned their new neighbors when the Partisans began approaching in September 1942: “Run Muslim brothers! The Serbs will slaughter us.”

Into the beginning of 1942, as the conflict between the Partisans and Chetniks escalated, the Chetnik leadership made several decisions which would ultimately lead to their defeat. First, they began collaborating with the Ustashas in order to fight against the Partisans. As the professed defenders of Serbdom, joining together with those who had murdered enormous numbers of Serbs during the summer of 1941 severely compromised their legitimacy. The Ustashas reluctantly agreed to this radical shift in policy out of necessity. The insurgency, which was a direct response their mass killing of Serbs, was beginning to threaten the stability of the NDH regime. In addition to Serbs, increasing numbers of Croats in Croatia were joining the Partisans. The Germans, who had installed the Ustashas in power, then began to criticize NDH’s violent policies towards the Serbs as the main reason for the lack of peace and stability in the region. These factors led the Ustashas to cease the killing of Serbs, and to begin collaborating with the Chetniks against the Partisans. The second element that weakened the Chetniks was their


323 The Germans suggested that the Serbian question could not be solved through the physical destruction of the Serb population of the NDH. Instead, they urged the Ustashas to make the Serbs into loyal citizens of the NDH. Soon after, the Ustashas reversed their previous course of action and forbid the killing of Serbs, the burning of their villages, and the stealing of their property. They even went so far as to create on 3 April 1942 a “Croatian Orthodox Church” for the Serbian citizens of the NDH. These policies amounted
decision to began collaborating with the occupying authorities (i.e., the Germans and the Italians), again in order to fight against the Partisans. This transformed them from nationalist insurgents into an arm of the occupier and, as a result, weakened their appeal among many Serbs.\textsuperscript{324} Such decisions prompted a large number of Chetniks to abandon their units and join the Partisans during the first months of 1942. These fighters had been practicing the centuries-old custom among Serbs of abstaining from shaving their faces and cutting their hair during times of war. Their new Partisan commanders ordered the long-haired and bushy-bearded fighters to groom themselves before joining their new comrades. As one young Partisan remembered: “We made fun of them because one part of their face was dark from the winter sun and another was light where they once had beards.”\textsuperscript{325}

This near-constant shifting back and forth of Serb insurgents between the Partisans and the Chetniks was a central feature of the early years of the war. As the Chetnik leadership increasingly compromised itself through collaboration with the Axis occupiers and the Ustashas, the Partisans began to gain more and more formerly Chetnik fighters. This brought into the Partisans large numbers of men who had spent the previous months murdering innocent Muslim men, women, and children. They joined other insurgents, now considered to be Partisans, who had never fought with the Chetniks, but had nevertheless originally joined the insurgency to take revenge on “the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{324} Ibid. 214-225.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{325} Bandžović, \textit{Ratna tragedija Muslimana}, 115.}
Turks.” While the Partisan leadership commanded a growing number of fighters by mid
1942, sizable numbers of them—both former Chetniks and insurgents-turned-Partisans—
were guilty of grave war crimes that they had committed against innocent Muslims
earlier in the war. This reality stood in stark contrast to the Partisan ideal of building a
multi-national guerrilla army of Serbs, Muslims, Croats, and others fighting together for
socialist revolution.

The steady trickle of Chetniks into the Partisan ranks would soon become a flood
as the Partisans gained the upper hand in the complex civil war which was unfolding.
The capitulation of the Italians in 1943 gave the Partisans a massive influx of weapons
and territory. Around the same time, intensive political work among the rank and file
finally brought an end to the Serb Partisan killing of Muslim and Croat civilians. These
efforts, when combined with ceaseless agitation in the villages in which Partisan political
activists stressed the equality of Serbs, Muslims and Croats, began to bring the first
sizeable numbers of Muslims and Croats into the Partisan Movement. 326 These men then
carried out their own political work in Serbian villages, presenting themselves to
frightened Serb peasants to be living proof that not all Muslims and Croats were
Ustashas. 327 While the majority of Partisan fighters were still overwhelmingly Serbs, the

326 On the position of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia during war with regards to the equality of Serbs,
Muslims and Croats, with special emphasis on the lengths the Party went to in order to stress the equality of
Muslims, as well as their special ethnic individuality, see Atif Purivatra, “Stav Komunističke partije
Jugoslavije prema nacionalnom pitanju Muslimana u toku Narodnooslobodilačkog rata,” in Purivatra,
Nacionalni i politički razvitak Muslimana, 66-119. As for the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, 138 had
joined the Partisans by the end of the war. Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 133-139.

327 The Muslim Partisan Esad Omanović recalled after the war how he and several other Muslims
encountered an old Serb woman in a village who offered them some milk. The woman told the men how
on the holiday of Ilindan in 1942 the Ustashas had attacked her village and set her house on fire, forcing her
to flee. Unaware that Omanović and his comrades were Muslims, she remarked: “Ilidan is coming up.
Once again the Turks will set everything on fire.” Omanović promised her that everything would be alright
in 1943 because Tito’s army was fighting against all fascists, including Ustashas and Chetniks. Then one
of his comrades called out to another: “Hakija (a Muslim name), it’s time to go!” The old woman began to
Partisan ideal of forging a multi-national fighting force became more of a reality between 1943 and 1944.\textsuperscript{328} By November 1944, however, the Partisan leadership made a pragmatic decision that led to the influx of large numbers of former Chetniks in their guerrilla army. On 21 November 1944, the decision was taken to grant a general amnesty to all fighters who had been in Chetnik units. The Partisan leadership gave these Chetniks until 15 January 1945 to take the opportunity to join the Partisans.\textsuperscript{329} Yet again, large numbers of men, who had previously gone to war to murder Muslims, poured into the Partisan ranks. They exchanged their hats with the Chetnik insignia of the skull and crossbones and put on Partisan caps with five-pointed red stars. Except in rare cases, the killings they had committed earlier in the war of Muslims were forgotten.

In the Kulen Vakuf region, these general wartime dynamics played out in specific ways. The handful of Communist commanders in the area organized a Partisan unit known as the \textit{Vakuf četa} [the Vakuf Unit], which was composed of about 140 fighters under the command of Nikola Karanović, the man who had led the initial ambush on the column of Ustashas and Muslim refugees on 6 September 1941. That attack marked the beginning of the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley. The vast majority, if

tremble and in a frightened voice said: “You’re Turks!? Are you going to burn everything down again?” The Muslim Partisans explained to her that she had nothing to be afraid of. Ildan 1943 came and went, and nothing was burned down. Omanović noted that from that point on the Serb women and children were no longer as frightened of the Muslims. On this story, see \textit{Krajina}, “Sjećanje na Ilindan 1943. godine,” 15 August 1954, 2

\textsuperscript{328} Somewhere between sixty-five to seventy percent of the Partisans were Serbs, while about twenty-five percent were Muslims and slightly less than ten percent were Croats. After 1943, the percentage of Serbs decreased slightly to about sixty-five percent due to the increased participation of Muslims and Croats. On these numbers, see Hoare, \textit{The History of Bosnia}, 262.

\textsuperscript{329} This amnesty also applied to soldiers in Croatia and Slovenia who had served as Domobrani (Home guards). On this decision, see “Odluka opštoj amnestije lica koja su u Četničkim jedinicama Draže Mihajlovića učestvovala ili ih pomagala ili su učestvovala u jedinicama hrvatskog i slovenačkog domobranstva,” br. 69, 21 November 1944, in \textit{Službeni list Državne Federativne Republike Jugoslavije}, br. 1, 1 February 1945, 6, cited in Muftić, \textit{Foća}, 178.
not all of the Partisans in the Vakuf Unit, were Serbs. A handful of them were active in creating local organizations of the Communist Party in the region, although by the end of the 1941 the party had influence in only three Serbian villages.\(^{330}\) By 1942, party members had managed to form a committee of the Communist Party for the entire Kulen Vakuf region.\(^{331}\) During 1942, local Partisan commanders did their best to stress to their rank and file that “the Turks” were not collectively guilty for the crimes of the Ustashas. And they ceaselessly emphasized the equality of Serbs, Muslims and Croats, and the need to fight together against the Axis occupiers and their domestic collaborators, the Ustashas and the Chetniks. This prompted a relatively small number of insurgents to abandon their units and seek out the Chetniks who were assembling in sizable numbers across the mountains in Lika. Two of the insurgent commanders who were most responsible for the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoć valley in September 1941, Mane Rovkić and Pero Đilas, abandoned the fledging Partisan units in the Kulen Vakuf region during late 1941 and early 1942 and joined the Chetniks.\(^{332}\) Several others who had directly participated in the killing of Muslims between 6-8 September, such as Stevo Rađenović, Boško Rašeta, and Jovo Keča, eventually joined them.\(^{333}\)

\(^{330}\) The villages were Očijevo, Cvjetnić, and Boboljuske. Bibanović, *Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena*, 111.

\(^{331}\) Milan Majstorović, “Kulen Vakuf opština u NOR-u,” 379.

\(^{332}\) On Mane Rovkić’s deeds as a Chetnik, see ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946, 2; Ibid., kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946, 3. On the fate of Pero Đilas, see Reljić, “Martin Brod 1941. godine,” 404-405; Polovina, *Svedočenje*, 92-93; Pero Pilipović, “Istina o jednom zločinu,” in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjedanja. Knjiga II* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR Bosanski Petrovac, 1974), 605; *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnoslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga I, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.* (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institute Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), Br. 42, “Izvještaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji,” undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, 134.

\(^{333}\) Danilo Damjanović-Danić, “Pad Kulen Vakufa,” 667.
14. Mane Rovkić (in the center of the photograph with a black hat and long beard) with Chetnik fighters. Before joining the Chetniks, he had been among the insurgents who attacked the Muslims fleeing from Kulen Vakuf on 6 September 1941. Rovkić apparently ordered the execution of at least seventy Muslim men at the Dugopolje pit, none of whom had been Ustashas. Source: Dušan Lukač, “Četnička izdaja u Bosanskoj Krajini 1941. godine i u prvoj polovini 1942. godine,” Zbornik krajinskih muzeja. Banja Luka, Bihać, Drvar, Jajce, Prijedor, 1, 1962, 281.

Unlike in eastern Bosnia, however, the Chetnik movement in the northwestern regions did not pose a major threat to the Partisans, who always maintained a significant numerical superiority. In November 1942, the Partisans launched a major assault on the city of Bihać and eventually managed to expel the Ustashas. This marked the end of the Ustasha control of the region. Northwestern Bosnia then became known as “The Bihać Republic” [Bihačka republika], a vast area of 48,000 square kilometers under Partisan control. It was in Bihać in November of 1942 that Tito and the rest of the Communist leadership held the first meeting of the Anti-fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of
Yugoslavia [Prvo zasjedanje anti-fašističko vijeće narodnog osloborenja Jugoslavije or AVNOJ], where they drew up the architecture for a new postwar Socialist Yugoslavia.334

The Partisan military successes in the Bihač region, and the departure for the Chetniks of a handful of insurgents from the Kulen Vakuf region who were directly involved in the massacres of Muslims, did not mean that Partisan units in the area were suddenly cleansed of those who had murdered Muslims. Derviš Kurtagić, a Muslim from Kulen Vakuf who joined the Partisans in 1941, tells a story in his memoirs about what the Partisan commander Nikola Karanović apparently said when he came across a group of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley that had recently joined the Partisans. He pointed to them and then called out to his Serb fighters: “Hey, there are our enemies!” The Muslim Partisans yelled back, asking why he called them “enemies” when they were with the Partisans. Karanović apparently answered: “Because those who killed your dearest are in our ranks and you can’t love us.”335

This story conveys a crucial truth about the composition of the Partisan units in the Kulen Vakuf region in the aftermath of the massacres. Although Pero Đilas, who had ordered over 400 Muslim men to their deaths at the Golubnjača pit, and Mane Rovkić, who had led the execution of more than seventy Muslim men at the Dugopolje pit, had left for the Chetniks, the vast majority of the Serbs who had participated in the massacres of 6-8 September 1941 were still with the Partisans. Rade Medić “Pitar,” the man who stood taller than the cornstalks, and who had apparently raped and killed Muslim women in the cornfields and then threw their children into the Una to drown, became a Partisan

334 On the battle for Bihać and the creation by Communists of the architecture for a postwar Yugoslavia, see Kosta Nad, Bihačka republika. Ratne uspomene Koste Nada (Zagreb: Spektar, 1982).

335 Kurtagić, Zapis o Kulen Vakufu, 36.
soldier. The Serb insurgent who Mujo Dervišević watched cut the throats of scores of Muslim men at Golubnjača had become a Partisan captain. And an insurgent by the name of Mikajlo Pilipović, who apparently would sometimes comment to his comrades about the difficulty in killing the Muslims Huso and Pašo Kosović because of their hard skulls, had become a Partisan colonel. None of these men were ever held responsible for their role in the massacres.

These instances were not isolated cases. Aside from the small number of insurgents who joined the Chetniks, and the insurgents-turned-Partisans who had been killed during the war, the rest of the men who had participated in the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley had become Partisans. Due the lack of archival documentation about the perpetrators of the massacres of Muslims in and around Kulen Vakuf, it is unfortunately impossible to determine a precise number of these men. But by examining some basic information about the scope, time frame, and geographical distribution of the killings, as well as the statements of survivors, it is possible to speculate about the size of the group of perpetrators who later became Partisans. Serb insurgents and peasants murdered nearly 2,000 Muslims during an approximately forty-eight hour period. This constitutes a murder rate of between one to two victims every minute and a half—without pause—during the entire period. There were five primary locations where these killings occurred. More than twenty kilometers separated the two massacre sites that were furthest apart from each other (the Dugopolje and Golubnjača pits). It seems that about 400-600 hundred of the victims were killed by gunshots, mostly

336 Ibid., 32.
337 Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Kajan, “Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača,” 27.
338 Puškar, Krajški Pečat, 96.
during the initial ambush near the villages of Prkosi and Ćovka, and later at the Dugopolje pit. The rest were murdered, for the most part, with knives, axes, and other farm tools.

The large number of victims, the relatively short time frame of the killings, the fairly wide geographical distribution of the primary massacre sites, and the more time consuming method used in a the majority of killings (i.e., through the use of sharp metal farm tools and similar weapons rather than by mass shootings)—all these elements suggest that the participation of at least several hundred insurgents and peasants was necessary for the killing of so many victims in such a short time period spread out over multiple locations. Statements by survivors of the massacres further suggest the participation of large numbers of perpetrators. For example, Hana Štrkljević remembered that “about 200 insurgents and peasants” attacked the Muslim women and children as they attempted to leave Kulen Vakuf for the village of Bjelaj. ³³⁹ This was an estimate of the number of perpetrators who participated in the killings at only one of the primary massacre sites. Mujo Dervišević, the only survivor of the mass killing of Muslim men and boys at the Golubnjača pit, remembered that “about five to six men carried out the killings, while around ten were standing guard.”³⁴⁰ This number did not include those insurgents who marched the victims to the massacre site. These witness statements in regard to only two of the massacre sites, and which most likely offer only a partial picture of the level of insurgent participation, already suggest that more than two hundred individuals took part in some way in the killings. If one adds to this the numbers of those who carried out the massacres at the initial ambush sites near the villages of Prkosi and

³³⁹ Testimony of Hana Štrkljević in Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 101.
³⁴⁰ Testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Ibid., 103.
Čovka, the executions at the Dugopolje pit, and the murders on and near the bridge at the Buk, the number of perpetrators could well have been several hundred more (i.e., perhaps 400 or more individuals).

It is impossible to determine precisely just how many participated, let alone their identities, due to the fact that Partisan commanders never ordered a wartime investigation into the massacres. A mere seven names of insurgent perpetrators, who later joined the Chetniks, appear in various wartime documents which the Partisans produced, or which were created after 1945 by Partisan veterans. After the war, some former Partisans attempted to assign responsibility for the killings only to these individuals, that is, to the so-called “Chetnik elements” among the insurgents. This interpretation is fundamentally flawed. One need only consider that the seven individuals in question would have needed to have murdered close to 300 Muslims each (or roughly one victim every ten or so minutes during the entire forty-eight hour period) to see that there is no way the responsibility for such a large number of victims, murdered in multiple locations, can be placed on such a small number of perpetrators. Again, the participation of at least several hundred insurgents and peasants was necessary given the high number of victims, the short time frame of the killings, and the relatively wide geographical distribution of the massacre sites. Aside from the handful of insurgents who went over the Chetniks, and perhaps another group who were later killed during the course of the war, a majority of these perpetrators must have remained with the Partisans until the end of the war in 1945.

The Partisan units in the Kulen Vakuf region by war’s end were thus a complex mixture of predominately Serb fighters. Some had distinguished themselves heroically

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341 These included Pero Đilas, Mane Rovkić, Stevo Radenović, Boško Rašeta, Jovo Keća, Đuro Štikovac, and Pajica Očiguz.
during the years 1941-1945, and included men who had saved innocent Muslims during the massacres in September 1941. But at least several hundred others had directly participated in the slaughter of about 2,000 of their Muslim neighbors. Now they were all members of a multi-national army which was expressly committed to building a multi-national socialist state. When the Partisans declared victory on 9 May 1945, it was this motley assortment of peasant fighters who would soon become the vast majority of the new leaders of the Ljutoč valley. Some were sincere supporters of the new multi-national socialist state, while others carried dark secrets of having murdered their Muslim neighbors.
Chapter Three

Coming Home: Everyday Experience and Political Context

The rushing water of the Una River which passes through part of the Ljutoć valley did not change much during the war years. Perhaps the only difference was the large number of trout swimming in its gurgling currents. Since the September 1941 massacres, no one had been left to fish for them. When Muslim refugees began returning to the area in the months after the formal end of the war they encountered a landscape that was at once familiar and unrecognizable. As they descended into the valley, Mount Ljutoć, visible at the horizon to their right, still towered above everything else in sight. The thick wooded forests on the hills were denser than ever, having not been cut in nearly half a decade. A handful of cornfields near what used to be the village of Orašac, the place where Serb insurgents had halted their attack on Kulen Vakuf in order to steal from Muslims houses, had been cultivated during the war years by a group of young Serbs who were members of the League of Communist Youth [Savez omladine]. And the old fortress, located high on the ridge above Kulen Vakuf in the village of Ostrovica, known to locals simply as “Grad” [The City], still dominated the western skyline and appeared as imposing as ever.

But much more was unfamiliar. The minarets of the mosques, several of which could be seen reaching for the sky on a clear day from the heights of the fortress, were gone. In Ćukovi and Orašac, the remnants the mosques, along with every other house, were nothing more than dark spots of ash on the ground. The mosque in Klisa, where Meho Hasanagić had gone with other local Muslims to hide from the Ustasha, and

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where he had killed an Ustasha who demanded that he go and murder Serbs in the village where his best friend lived, had once stood on a small hill which overlooked the Una. Now, nothing was left on the site. And the mosque in Kulen Vakuf, where Esad Bibanović, his brother Ibrahim, and Džafer Demirović had unfurled a red flag on the morning of 6 September 1941 as they anxiously awaited the arrival of the Serbian insurgents, had been burned to the ground by those same fighters with whom the three Muslim Communists had hoped to join in the fight against fascism.

The wooden houses of Kulen Vakuf, many of which had been built on stilts to withstand the rising waters of the Una, had vanished. Everything of value which the Muslims of the town had once possessed, all the items which the Communist political commissar Đoko Jovanić had seen in those “clean and orderly” houses that he peered into on the morning of 6 September 1941, had been stolen or went up in flames. The Muslims who returned to the other villages in the area—Čukovi, Orašac, Klisa, and Ostrovica—faced the same situation. They had nowhere to live, all of their possessions were gone, their houses had been plundered and burned, and their fields, for the most part, had gone uncultivated since 1941.343

The age and gender of the returning refugees reflected the nature of the massacres which they had survived. The vast majority of them were women and children, along with some elderly. Men, who the insurgents had singled out for execution most especially at the Dugopolje and Golubnjača pits, were conspicuous by their relative absence. The September massacres had drastically reduced the male Muslim population

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343 Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 5 October 2008 in Klisa; Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
of the Ljutoč valley. By some accounts, the initial wave of returning refugees was nearly all women and children. Their first task was securing food and shelter. With little assistance from the fledgling Communist regime, the women went to work building improvised shelters which they constructed out of wooden planks, and other makeshift materials which they found in the rubble of their burnt villages. They placed grass on top of the structures which functioned as sort of temporary roof. Members of extended families lived crowded together, and in many cases several families shared these “houses.”

They would live in these cramped and flimsy dwellings for many more years, as the local authorities proved unable to provide real building materials throughout much of the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s. This situation resulted in quite a bit of skepticism towards the new Communist regime, as reports from 1948 indicating that people were still frequently making the same basic demand: “Build us houses and give us horses to plow the land.” Five years later, Communists assessing the situation in Kulen Vakuf still reported that many people there were “living in ruins.” And even by the end of the 1950s, the local regional newspaper ran a story under the headline “The Ruins of Kulen Vakuf,” noting that “nowhere else in the region are there as many burned

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344 Interview with anonymous informant on 11 October 2008; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

345 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

346 ABiH, Fond Centralnog komiteta (CK) Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine (SK BiH), kut. 175, Izvještaj za mjesec decembar 1947. godine o radu i stanju na terenu sreza Bosanski Petrovac, 29 December 1947, 1.

347 Ibid., kut. 297, Izvještaj sa terena Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Bihać, Umska Pruga, Cazin, 1948, 22.

348 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 145, Neki problemi u Kulen Vakufu koji se moraju odmah riješiti, August 21, 1953, p. 3.
down houses as in Kulen Vakuf.”349 International organizations, such as the United Nations and the Red Cross, played a major role as the main suppliers of food to the Muslims in the Ljutoč valley in the initial years after the war. Flour, potatoes, canned goods and other supplies arrived from abroad. Without this assistance the basic survival of the returning refugees would have been in question.350

The Muslim families that returned were fragmented units, often missing a sizable number of members due to the massacres and subsequent dislocation. Children, who were sent to orphanages in towns and cities throughout the NDH after their parents were killed in the massacres, returned to the valley between 1945 and 1946 after their aunts or uncles found them and brought them home. Sometimes children had been sent to such institutions even when their parents had survived, and thus it was necessary for mothers and fathers to search for their children in Croatian cities like Zagreb and Rijeka during the first years after the war. Frequently the NDH authorities had subjected these Muslim children to pressure from Catholic priests to convert. Such children, after having survived the massacres, lived during the war years without their parents, and then been strongly encouraged to forget their Muslims identities, arrived home confused and disorientated. In other cases, like that of Derviš Dervišević and his sister Šefika from Klisa, siblings were separated from one another in orphanages at the end of the war, and,

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350 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October in Kulen Vakuf.
being too young to remember the exact location of their villages, did not reunite until decades after the war.\textsuperscript{351}

Although the returning Muslim refugees attempted to reunite with their families and secure basic needs such as food and shelter, they had to contend with the new local authorities who were overwhelmingly composed of Serbs, despite being a minority population in the valley. For example, during the second half of the 1940s, the secretaries of the basic committees [\textit{osnovni komiteti}] of the Communist Party in Kulen Vakuf and Orašac, where more than ninety five percent of the population was Muslim, were both Serbs.\textsuperscript{352} This overrepresentation of Serbs in the Communist Party (renamed the League of Communists [\textit{Savez komunista}] in 1952) in the Kulen Vakuf region would remain more or less constant throughout the first decade after the war and beyond.\textsuperscript{353} Like most local committees of the Communist Party throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the membership in the Kulen Vakuf region was composed of ex-Partisan fighters who were largely of peasant origin and poorly educated. Illiteracy and very minimal levels of

\textsuperscript{351} Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 1 and 5 October 2008 in Klisa; Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; On the case of Derviš Dervišević and his sister Šefika, see also Nurija Rošić, “Arena traži vaše najmilije. Sjetili se pljeska,” \textit{Arena}, 1978 (date and month unavailable), 20.

\textsuperscript{352} Đure Kresoje was the secretary of the basic committee of the Communist Party in Orašac and Mićo Radak held the same position in Kulen Vakuf. See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 327, Zapisnik sa sastanka Sreskog komiteta Komunističke Partije Jugoslavije (KPJ) BiH, Bosanski Petrovac, 3 May 1949, 1.

\textsuperscript{353} In 1955, the basic committee of the League of Communists for the municipality of Kulen Vakuf had thirteen members. Eleven were Serbs and two were Muslims. See AUSK, Fond SK SK Bihać, kut. 147, Sisak rukovodećeg kadra u Savezu komunista i predsjednika NO opština na terenu sreza Bihać, 27 September 1955. The situation did not change during the years 1956-1957. See in Ibid., kut. 152, Analiza o kadru u opštinskom komitetu i osnovnim organizacijama Saveza komunista na području opštine Kulen Vakuf, 10 January 1956, 1. In addition, the leading positions of authority, that is, the Secretary of the League of Communists and the President of the Municipality, were almost always occupied by Serbs through the mid 1950s. See in Ibid., Spisak predsjednika NO opština i sekretara komiteta sreza bihaćkog, 1956, 1. By the 1959, the imbalance was still striking. The national composition of the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was as follows: 5,300 Serbs (57%), 270 Croats (2.9%) and 3,720 Muslims (40.1%). The national composition of the League of Communist, however, was not congruent to these numbers, with 196 Serbs (76%), 7 Croats (2.7%), and 59 Muslims (23%). See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 7, Izvještaj o radu na brojnom jačanju organizacija Saveza komunista na opštinama Bihać, Bosanska Krupa, i Kulen Vakuf, 15 June 1959, 11.
schooling were commonplace among Party members. Many had little interest attending party meetings, and preferred instead to spend their time drinking in local taverns. Others, who had joined the Partisans very late in the war, were said to be “weak elements” who sometimes maintained their links to Chetniks, some of whom were still apparently hiding in the forests.

In general, the young age, low levels of ideological awareness of the Communist regime’s agenda, and overall inexperience of the predominately Serb Party members left most ill-prepared to assume political leadership of the region. For example, in 1948, some Serb Party members who lived near Drvar were apparently assisting the Serbian Orthodox Church in organizing various large gatherings, despite the fact that the Party was waging a campaign against the influence of the clergy. Such behavior resulted in embarrassing situations which infuriated higher organs in the Communist Party, as was the case in 1949 when more people attended an event that the Orthodox Church organized in the village of Vrtoče than the celebration on the same day for 27 July 1941, which commemorated the beginning of the Communist insurgency during the war.

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354 For example, more than ten years after the war, out the 230 members of the Municipal Committee of the League of Communist for Kulen Vakuf, thirty two had no education whatsoever and 162 had only finished some primary school. Nineteen had some kind of skilled training, and only thirteen had finished high school. None had finished university. See Ibid., kut. 151, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Mjesečni izvještaj o godinama starosti članova Saveza komunista na terenu, 5 April 1956. On the low levels of education of members of the League of Communists in the wider Bihać region in which the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was located, see also Ibid., kut. 148, Analiza rukovodčeg partijskog kadra na terenu sreza Bihać, 16 January 1956, 8.


356 Ibid., kut. 205, Mjesečni izvještaj o radu SK KPJ Bihać, 31 January 1948, 2.

357 Ibid., Mjesečni izvještaj o radu SK KPJ Bosanski Petrovac, 31 January 1948, 2.

358 Ibid., kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Stanje po okruzima: Okrug Bihać, Političko stanje, 1948, 1.
Other problems with party members in the Kulen Vakuf region reflected behaviors that had little to do with a lack of political consciousness. The secretary of the Communist Party in the village of Ćukovi was replaced because he had two wives, although he was not officially married to the second. Veljko Medić, a Party member from Martin Brod, was said to have been drunk most of the time, and stood accused of raping several women, one of whom was a fellow party member. It appears that wife beating was a common problem among many party members in the region, as was the frequent use of public funds for private use.

In some cases, the returning Muslims faced discrimination from some local Serbs in the Communist Party. Apparently some of these Serbs would force the small numbers of Muslim men to participate in work brigades that were ordered go to the forest to cut wood. No Serbs were instructed to join in such work actions. This appears to have been a way for the local Serbs to communicate to the returning Muslims that they, the Serbs, had “won” the war, and that they were in control. This feeling of superiority among some Serbs manifested itself in other ways, such as in the villages of Kestenovac and Doljani, where ex-Serb Partisans felt that they should not have to pay taxes since it

359 Ibid., kut. 319, Informacije Oblasnog komiteta KP BiH Banja Luka Org.-instruktorsko odjeljenje, Strogo povjerljivo, 20 August 1949, 3.

360 Ibid., kut. 528, Izvještaj za srez i grad Bihać, 1950, 9.

361 Ibid., Izvještaj Grupe partiske ekipe CK koja je obišla mjesno područje Martin Brod, 1950, 2. For more examples of similar behaviors exhibited by party members, see AUSK, SK SK BiH, kut. 140, Izvještaj o greškama pojedinih članova biro-a i plenuma Sreskog komiteta Bihać, 7 July 1952, 1-4; Referat, 30 August 1952, 4.


363 Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 46.
was they who fought and won the war. Some Serbs outside the Communist Party were more explicit about their negative feelings for their Muslim neighbors. Father Branislav Branić, an Orthodox priest in the Kulen Vakuf region, minced no words when he referred to Muslims as “dogs” during a funeral which was held in the village of Rajinvoci, located not far from Kulen Vakuf. He urged the Serbs present to protect themselves, alluding perhaps to the widespread notion held by many Serbs that Muslims in the area had once been Ustashas, by saying that “a dog that bit you last year will bite you again this year.” The priest cautioned all Serbs to avoid storing hay near their houses because he believed that the Muslims might come and set it on fire. The existence of such rhetoric prompted some Party members to worry about the lack of “brotherhood” in the region between Serbs and Muslims.

At the same time, there were encounters between Serbs and Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region during the early postwar years which reaffirmed the long-standing tradition of friendship across the lines of nationality and confession. A day before Mujo Dervišević, the only survivor of the massacre of Muslim men at Golubnjača, ran away

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364 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 175, Izvještaj o radu Sreskog komiteta KPJ Bihać, 30 December 1947, 1.

365 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza o djelovanju klera na srezu bihačkom, 20 April 1952, 1. For further information on this incident, see in Ibid., kut. 140, Političko stanje i rad masovih organizacija na terenu Bihać, 1952, 8. The involvement of Serbian Orthodox priests in spreading nationalistic views was not limited to the Kulen Vakuf region in the years after the Second World War. Father Gaković, who lived in the Bosanska Krupa region, located northeast of Kulen Vakuf, was reportedly to have said that Serbs should thank the Chetniks for their struggle during the war, which amounted to the glorification of violence against Muslims. On this incident, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Stanje po okruzima: Okrug Bihać, Političko stanje, 1948, 1.

366 For examples at the local level, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 175, Izvještaj za mjesec decembar 1947. godine o radu i stanju na terenu sreza Bosanski Petrovac, 29 December 1947, 2; AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza izvršenja plana SK KP BiH Bihać za IV. Tromjesečje, 1950, 1. For evidence on the lack of “brotherhood” among Serbs and Muslims more generally throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 56, O nekim negativnim pojavama u partiskim organizacijama, 1952, 11.
from his would-be killers, a Serb insurgent saved the lives of his wife and children. Like so many of the Muslim women and children, they were fleeing from the mass of revenge-seeking Serb peasants and insurgents. Two of them caught Dervišević’s wife and children, and were about to murder them when a Serb insurgent intervened. He protected them and took them to safe shelter. After the war this man became an officer in the Yugoslav People’s Army and, when visiting the Kulen Vakuf region during the first few years after the war, decided to drop in on Dervišević’s family in Klisa to say hello and see how they were doing. Dervišević’s wife beamed with joy when she saw the man who had saved her and her children, and would always say of him: “I love him like my own brother.”367 This type of interaction showed how the massacres, and specifically the efforts that neighbors took to save neighbors, had the paradoxical effect of strengthening bonds between some Serbs and Muslims in the region in the early years after the war.

These positive moments, combined with the excitement most refugees felt about returning to their home villages, provided a powerful counterbalance to the difficult material circumstances and direct and indirect discrimination they faced. Many would gather together with relatives and neighbors at the end of the day and sing songs while dancing the kolo, holding hands while spinning round and round to the music which men played on harmonicas. As Mustafa Dervišević, a teenage refugee from Klisa remembered: “There was barely any food, but people were in a good mood. We were glad that we had come home to our land, to live once again.”368 A woman who lived nearby his house conveyed the atmosphere: “Everything was destroyed and ruined, but

367 Interview with Đula Seferović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.

368 Interview with Mustafa Dervišević on 11 October 2008 in Klisa.
everything was also wonderful, really wonderful. ”369 It seemed that many refugees were simply happy to have survived the war, returned home, and once again be among their relatives and neighbors. Derviš Dervišević, who had been found as a four-year old sitting next to his mother’s body after the insurgents murdered her in the first wave of killings in September 1941, remembered that “there was a sense of happiness after the war. People loved each other, they hugged each other.”370 Members of the Communist Party whose duty it was to report on the mood of the population noticed these sentiments and informed the Central Committee in Sarajevo that “the people seem alive and engaged.”371 Another reason for the positive mood had to do with the fact that by 1947 the government had mobilized what men there were in the Ljutoč valley to help rebuild the railroad lines between Bihać and Knin in Croatia.372 This gave them a sense of purpose and, most importantly, an income with which to support their families.373 By 1949, there was an equal demand for men to work in the forestry industry, especially in the factories and saw mills located in the nearby town of Drvar.374 The act of working and rebuilding their villages, of reuniting with relatives and neighbors displaced by the war, as well as with some of the Serbs who had saved many of their lives, appear to have been the central

369 Interview with anonymous informant on 11 October 2008.

370 Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 1 October 2008 in Klisa.


372 The Party placed such emphasis on the task of rebuilding the railroad that it soon faced a shortage of workers. See in Ibid., kut. 297, Izvještaj sa terena Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Bihać, Unska Pruga, Cazin, 1948, 29; Ibid., kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bihaće, 11 May 1949, 1.

373 Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 1 October 2008 in Klisa.

374 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bihać, 1 May 1949, 1; 28 May 1949, 1; 22 June 1949, 1; 28 June 1949, 1; 12 July 1949, 1.
elements which sustained the refugees materially and emotionally during the first years after the war.

While the Muslims in the Ljutoč valley did their best to rebuild their lives during the early postwar years, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina was engaged with instituting a number of policies which would significantly affect their prospects for renewing their prewar way of life. A sizable number of these measures were geared towards settling scores with what the Party considered to be the enemies of the new regime. While never explicitly framed as anti-Muslim, or anti-Serb or anti-Croat, the Party’s actions nonetheless left many individuals feeling that they were being persecuted and discriminated against because of their nationality, religion, as well as real and perceived wartime conduct. Policies that directly affected the Muslim population included the shutting down of many religious schools; the ban on wearing the veil, hijab and burkha; the persecution of the “Young Muslims” [Mladi Muslimani] political group; and the decision of the Communist regime not to recognize Muslims as an official nationality. Another important policy which left many Muslims feeling discriminated against was the regime’s decision to not conduct investigations into the vast majority of the mass killings of Muslim civilians. In the Kulen Vafuf region, this choice laid a crucial cornerstone for the creation of the culture of silence which was to emerge about the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley murdered by Serb insurgents in September 1941.

One of the Party’s most pressing tasks immediately after the war was to deal with the remnants of the Chetniks and Ustashas, some of whom had taken to the forests and
were continuing to resist the authorities. As had been the case near the end of the war, the Communist regime offered amnesty to Chetniks in 1946. This helped to bring some of the Serbs out of the forests where they had been hiding from the Administration of State Security, known to most by its acronym UDBA (*Uprava državne bezbjednosti*). For those who refused, the authorities placed total economic blockades around the villages suspected of supporting them. When this proved insufficient, they resettled the relatives and neighbors believed to be taking food to the Chetnik rebels hiding in the hills, or expropriated their property. The remnants of the Ustashas, while less numerous, proved more difficult to eradicate, as they often murdered Croats who collaborated with the Communist Party, and thus the Party’s influence remained weakest in Croatian villages. The number of Muslims evading and resisting the new regime was said to have been very small and limited mostly to the Cazin region, an area located around one hundred kilometers north of Kulen Vakuf.

The UDBA-led actions to “cleanse” these so-called bandits from the hills and forests continued throughout 1947-1948, and in certain areas even throughout the first years of the 1950s. The authorities often mobilized local populations to assist them in their search and destroy operations, and it appears that many were more than happy to contribute to routing out these “enemy elements.” The UDBA units which were responsible for the Bihać and Bosanski Petrovac regions, to which Kulen Vakuf and the rest of the Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley belonged, seem to have been composed

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376 Ibid., 2. By the beginning of 1947, the Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that there were still around 1,320 “bandits” hiding in the forests. 776 were thought to be Chetniks, 500 Ustashes, and 46 “Green Cadres” [*zeleni kader*], a euphemism for Muslims.

377 Ibid., kut. 192, Analiza izvještaja od Sreskih komiteta o političkoj situaciji na terenu, Org.-instrutorsko odjeljenje, 19 November 1947, 1.
almost exclusively of Serb officers.\(^{378}\) It appears that they carried out their cleansing operations according to the law, without any abuses of the civilian population. There were no reported acts of violence which violated regulations, and the officers had support from a large number of villagers in their actions.\(^{379}\)

The situation was radically different in other parts of the republic. In the Mrkonjić-Grad region, for example, UDBA officers beat to death the men whom they arrested, and then simply returned their personal belongings to their families without offering any explanation as to the fate of the prisoners.\(^{380}\) A number of UDBA officers used their positions to steal horses, wood, and food from villages where they carried out their operations, which they then used for themselves or sent home to their own families. Local peasants were powerless to stop them.\(^{381}\) In eastern Bosnia, Herzegovina, and other regions, some UDBA officers committed abuses which caused people to see them as heavily biased towards certain nationalities. In the Rogatica region, a Muslim officer publicly beat a Serb woman who he believed was helping the rebels.\(^{382}\) In the Banja Luka region, another Muslim officer beat a Serb to death whom he suspected of concealing a machine gun. He committed this murder in front of the man’s wife whom he

\(^{378}\) Ibid., kut. 175, Stanje partijske organizacije Srez Bihać, December 1947.

\(^{379}\) Ibid., Ibid., kut. 211, Podaci iz UDBE o čišćenju neprijateljskih bandova sa terena, 1948, Sreski komitet Bihać, 14 February 1948, 1; Sreski komitet Drvar, 16 February 1948, 1; Sreski komitet Bosanski Petrovac, 16 February 1948, 1.

\(^{380}\) Ibid., Sreski komitet Mrkonjić-Grad, 18 February 1948, 3.

\(^{381}\) Ibid., See Sreski komitet Rogatica, 17 February 1948, 1, where UDBA officers stole horses; Sreski komitet Derventa, 18 February 1948, 2, where they took wood from peasants and had it sent home to their own families; and Sreski komitet Banja Luka, 20 February 1948, 1, where they stole food for themselves and their families.

\(^{382}\) Ibid., Sreski komitet Rogatica, 17 February 1948, 1.
also beat. In the end, no weapons were ever found.\textsuperscript{383} In another instance, two Muslim UDBA officers in the Gradačac region demanded \textit{rakija} [wine] from a Serb woman, who, when she refused, was beaten to death. The officers stayed in the woman’s house until 3:00 in the morning drinking.\textsuperscript{384} Serb officers were also guilty of abuses towards Muslims, as was the case in the Zvornik region when one beat several Muslim men while yelling “Fuck your \textit{balija} (derogatory term for a Muslim) mother and your mosque!”\textsuperscript{385}

Similar abuses occurred in the Stolac region where UDBA officers attacked entire Muslim families and then stole their property.\textsuperscript{386} In the Fojnica region, anti-Croat sentiment appears to have run so deep among some UDBA officers that they carried out mass arrests of all Croats. This included Croat members of the Communist Party, men who were considered by the regional authorities to be “the best people on the terrain.”\textsuperscript{387}

These types of abuses caused many Serb, Muslim, and Croat villagers to feel that they were being singled out for mistreatment because of their nationality. As some Serb villagers commented in the aftermath of an UDBA cleansing operation in which Muslim officers were highly visible: “They will kill all of us Serbs...the government is arming

\begin{footnotes}
\item[383] Ibid., Sreski komitet Banja Luka, 20 February 1948, 1. For an overview of the abuses that occurred during UDBA cleansing operations against „Chetnik bands,” which included those committed in the Banja Luka region, see in Ibid., kut. 294, Izvještaj o nepravilnostima i izgrecima organa UDB-e i milicije učinjenih prilikom izvođenja akcija na četničke bande poslednjih mjeseci na srezovima Mrkonjić-Grada, Banja Luka, Kotor Varoš, Teslić i Tesanj, 1948, 1-9.
\item[384] Ibid., Sreski komitet Gradačac, 14 February 1948, 1.
\item[385] Ibid., Sreski komitet Zvornik, 18 February 1948, 2. The Bosnian word “\textit{balija}” originally referred to a Muslim peasant. However, the word eventually became a derogatory way to refers to Muslims. See Abdulah Škaljić, \textit{Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom jeziku} (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1966), 118.
\item[386] Ibid., Sreski komitet Stolac, 17 February 1948, 1.
\item[387] Ibid., Sreski komitet Fojnica, 19 February 1948, 1.
\end{footnotes}
Turks to kill Serbs…”Muslims and Croats who suffered at the hands of Serb UDBA officers had similar sentiments about the reasons for their perceived persecution.

A second area in which the Communist regime contributed to a feeling among certain segments of the population of being persecuted because of their nationality and confession was its approach to dealing with the clergy. This was a central arena in which the new regime sought to settle scores with real and perceived enemies. Freedom to practice one’s religion was enshrined in Yugoslavia’s first constitution of 1946; in practice, however, the clergy was highly attuned to what it saw as the government’s implicit and frequent explicit hostility to religion. As way to combat this, as well as simply to rebuild their communities after the devastating years of the war, the Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic clergies and their supporters set about reviving their religious life. Despite the massive destruction of the war and the drastic shortages of building materials, many of the members of all three confessions threw themselves into the task of rebuilding their houses of worship and restarting religious education.

The Muslim clergy throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina was especially active in this regard, collecting funds for new mosques and opening schools known as mektebe for the Islamic instruction of children. In the few areas which managed to rebuild mosques

388 Ibid., Sreski komitet Gradačac, 14 February 1948, 1.

389 As for how many people were directly affected by the UDBA cleansing operations during the first decade after the war, the following statistics compiled by the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina are relevant: between 1945-1956, UDBA officers and their civilian collaborators executed 1,914 Ustaschas and 3,184 Chetniks, and put on trial and punished another 1,228 Ustaschas, 1,224 Chetniks and 12,861 “accomplices” (jataci). If one adds to these groups the considerable numbers of family members, many of whom either directly assisted or at sympathized with the various rebels, then the number of those who directly and indirectly suffered during the cleansing operations was significant. On these figures, see in Ibid., kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljskih aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 13-14.

390 Ibid., kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Politička situacija, 1948, 1-2.
in the first years after the war, crowds in the thousands gathered for the opening celebrations.\textsuperscript{391} In the Ljutoč valley, the Muslims of Orašac were the most proactive when it came to rebuilding their religious lives. Despite their poverty and a material existence that depended, for the most part, on donations, they began constructing two mosques and managed to open four mektebe by 1948.\textsuperscript{392} The regional party leadership in Bihać noted several years later that the success of such rebuilding efforts, as well as those by the Orthodox and Catholic clergies, showed the religious communities of the region to be more active than members of the Communist Party in their activities.\textsuperscript{393}

The Communist regime generally viewed most of the clergy as “reactionary elements” whose basic task was to set people of different nationalities and confessions against one another.\textsuperscript{394} There were numerous instances which appeared to give the Party evidence for this perception. For example, party members noted that a number of Serb Orthodox priests had a tendency to publicly defend the Chetniks, which they believed contributed to the spreading of hatred towards others, most especially Muslims.\textsuperscript{395} In some regions of the republic, the Orthodox clergy drew attention to the pits where Ustashas had murdered Serbs during the war. Some accused all Croats of being Ustashas and said that they should be killed.\textsuperscript{396} Others directed their hostility towards Muslims by

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., kut. 192, Analiza izvještaja od Sreskih komiteta o političkoj situaciji na terenu, Org.-instruktorsko odjeljenje, 19 November 1947, 2.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., kut. 213, Izvještaj o radu istanju sreza Bosanski Petrovac, 25 February 1948, 3.
\textsuperscript{393} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Izvještaj Sreskog komiteta KPJ Bihać po raznim pitanjima, 1951, 12.
\textsuperscript{394} ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 3, Neke karateristike djelatnosti klera u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1954, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid., kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Politička situacija, 1948, 3.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., Stanje po okruzima: Okrug Hercegovina, 1.
demanding that they leave Yugoslavia and move to Turkey.\textsuperscript{397} The members of the Muslim clergy, for their part, were said to talking about “the Chetnik spirit” of party politics. Some criticized the Party’s support of the writer Ivo Andrić, who they viewed as anti-Muslim. Others were angry that the education system was apparently showing everything about Serbian history in a positive light, while negating Muslim contributions in the past.\textsuperscript{398}

In other cases, the authorities appeared to have interpreted what were essentially conservative religious practices and traditions as forms of “chauvinism,” that is, as acts which threatened others on the basis of their nationality and damaged national relations in some way. For example, in the Islamic community of Orašac in 1948, the Party concluded that the local \textit{hodža} [Imam] was spreading chauvinism by forbidding Muslim women from attending Communist-held conferences. As a conservative community in which women traditionally did not participate in political life, he appealed to the women’s fear of not being cared for in the afterlife by telling them that attending the meetings would result in their souls being abandoned upon death. The Party saw his actions as preventing the mixing of Serbs and Muslims, and went on to conclude that because of this he was contributing the spreading of hatred between the two groups.\textsuperscript{399}

The Party’s perception of the overarching negative role of religion resulted in constant discussion during much of the first postwar decade about how to restrict the role of the clergy without doing away with the constitutionally-guaranteed right to religious

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\footnotetext{397}{Ibid., kut. 3, Neke karateristike djelatnosti klera u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1954, 2.}
\footnotetext{398}{Ibid., kut. 36, Nešto o djelovanju crkve i o mjerama koje treba preduzeti za suzbijanje širenje njenog uticaja, 1952, 9.}
\footnotetext{399}{Ibid., kut. 213, Izvještaj o radu i stanju sreza Bosanski Petrovac, 25 February 1948, 3.}
\end{footnotes}
freedom. The tension between these contradictory desires was exemplified in a speech given in the Bihać region in 1952: “Regulating relations with the religious communities should not stop the Party in its anti-religious propaganda, and in its political struggle against the reactionary clergy. The state is not leading a struggle against religion and the church, but misuse of the church and religion against the social order cannot be allowed in our country.”400 UDBA was especially concerned about the increasing influence of the clergy and in 1952 issued internal directives to its regional organs which aimed to solve the problem. These policies were aimed at all religious communities.401 However, as the Islamic community had been especially active in rebuilding its religious life in the early postwar years, some of the measures to be taken were aimed specifically against Muslims.

The enemy acts of the clergy of all three faiths have been becoming more and more pronounced. They are using “our democratic freedom,” with regards to the freedom to practice religion, to wage a struggle against Communists. The houses of worship have been focal points for this struggle, and are the places where contributions are collected for new houses of worship. Church and mosque councils play a special role, as generally the most reactionary individuals are members of these councils (e.g., kulaks, former Chetnics, Ustaschas, etc.). The opening of religious schools (e.g., mektebe) and other religious holidays are the main ways that enemy activities are spreading. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) should shut down all mektebe which do not have permission to be working. All clergy which do not stop this activity will be charged under the law for disturbing public order and peace.402

In addition to moving to shut down all unofficially-sanctioned mektebe, in 1950 the authorities passed a law which outlawed Muslim women wearing the veil, hijab and

400 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Referat, 30 August 1952, 3-4.
burkha, another repressive policy which was directly aimed at the Islamic community. Local Communists, especially Muslim members of the Party, held mass meetings and often went house to house in villages in order to convince Muslim women to accept the new law. When this was unsuccessful, the authorities used fines and the threat of prison to compel the rest. It appears that resistance to the law was greatest in the more isolated villages, but ultimately most Muslim women had uncovered their faces and heads by the early 1950s. In the Ljutoč valley, the vast majority of the Muslim women of Kulen Vakuf, Klisa, and even those in the more religiously conservative village of Orašac, had accepted the law by this time.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 547, Informacija o skidanju zara na području sarajevske oblasti do 25.X.1950, 25 October 1950; AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza izvršenja plana SK KP BiH Bihać, za IV. tromjesečnje, 1950, 1.}

Concurrently with these anti-religious policies, the Communist regime carried out a series of arrests of men believed to have been part of an illegal organization called the “Young Muslims” [\textit{Mladi Muslimani}]. This organization, with slightly over a thousand members in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the second half of the 1940s, apparently had links to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria. The regime believed that its main objective was to spread Pan-Islamic ideas and to promote the creation of a Pan-Islamic state, to which it was hoped the Muslims of Yugoslavia would one day be attached. It appears that many of the Muslim men who were drawn to the group participated out of a desire to resist what they saw as the repressive policies of Communist regime towards the Islamic community, especially its efforts to shut down the \textit{metkebe} and outlaw the veil, hijab, and burkha. UDBA eventually arrested nearly 900 Muslims, mostly students at religious secondary schools [\textit{medrese}] in their late teens and early twenties, who it
believed were members of the “Young Muslims.” The first wave of arrests in 1946 resulted in prison terms; the second wave in 1949 demonstrated the regime’s increasing willingness to resort to harsh repression, as five suspected “Young Muslims” were executed by firing squad.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljske aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervativizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 21.} The “Young Muslims” had the most support in the larger cities and towns of Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Mostar. It appears that not a single Muslim in the Ljutoč valley had been involved with the organization, and only three members were discovered in the nearby city of Bihać.\footnote{Ibid., Prilog 1, Brojno stanje pripadnika “Mladih muslimana” po opštinama. In addition to Sarajevo (with 186 members), Tuzla (84), and Mostar (88), the other towns in the republic with significant numbers of Young Muslims were Cazin (20), Goradže (16), Ćapljina (34), Nevesinje (76), Gaćo (19), Zvornik (37), Travnik (14), Maglaj (25), Tešanj (57), Foča (28), Višegrad (19), Konjic (43), Stolac (23), Bileća (59), Visoko (60), Gračanica (17), and Zenica (14).}

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the regime instituted these policies which were aimed at subduing the Islamic community, it appears that there were few, if any, political problems in Kulen Vakuf when it came to the Muslims and their practice of Islam. The absence of a mosque meant that the possibilities for religious instruction were limited. With no hodža in town, a handful of elderly men took it upon themselves to give lessons in Islam to children in private homes.\footnote{Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.} Although not an officially sanctioned mekebe, it appears that the local authorities turned a blind eye to this practice and let the instruction go on.\footnote{It appears that the authorities decided to permit religious instruction in private homes only in cases when the family asked the hodža to give such instruction to the children who lived in the home where the instruction was to take place. On this policy, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Referat, 30 August 1952, 4.} For most children, however, it seems that their mothers or other female relatives were those who taught them the most about Islam and being Muslim. In
the absence of any kind of strong official religious life, the Muslim women of Kulen Vakuf, and those in the other villages of the Ljutoč valley, appear to have been the main agents of informal Islamic religious instruction during the first years after the war.408

By the early 1950s, some Muslims in Kulen Vakuf began to propose the idea of following their more assertive neighbors in Orašac by rebuilding their mosque. It appears that they voiced their initial desire behind closed doors in 1952, but Party members learned of their intentions and intervened, dissuading them from pursuing the matter any further.409 Then they formed a small council whose members sought out official permission from the local Serb-dominated authorities. They apparently submitted their proposal to rebuild the mosque, but received no response.410 The authorities neither accepted nor rejected their plan, which the council interpreted as a form of unspoken approval. And so, beginning around 1955, work slowly began in order to prepare the site in the centre of town for construction.411 One condition the authorities did unofficially place on the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf was that all donations and building materials for the mosque had to come from local residents. This would ensure that the construction would proceed at an extremely slow pace, as local building materials and money were scare, and the number of men available to work was very small.412 Some Muslim

408 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. On the central role played by women in transmitting Islamic religious practice and a sense of Muslim identity in Bosnia, see Tone Bringa, Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 86, 158.


410 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.

411 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

412 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
residents were glad that the construction of a new mosque would not be completed anytime soon. Like those before the Second World War, who believed that a great political upheaval would ensue whenever the Ostrovica River dried up, there were Muslims in Kulen Vakuf who held superstitious ideas about the mosque. One man apparently remarked: “Yes, the mosque is going to be rebuilt, but the longer it takes, so much the better.” When asked why, he replied: “As soon as a mosque is built there will be another war.”413 Others wanted the construction to proceed slowly for less mystical reasons. They were afraid of what some of their Serb neighbors might think of a new mosque in Kulen Vakuf, a place that many saw as a home to “Turks” who had been Ustaschas during the war.414

The indirect resistance of the local authorities to rebuilding the mosque, along with the fear as to how Serbs in the region might react, contributed to feelings of apprehension among many of the Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region. The other republic-wide policies which were aimed at subduing the Islamic community—the closing of many mektebe, the prohibition of Muslim women from wearing the veil, hijab and burkha, and the persecution of Muslim men thought to be “Young Muslims”—fueled an overarching atmosphere in which many Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina felt discriminated against because of their religion and culture.415 Yet it was the decision

413 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.

414 Ibid.

415 All of the policies instituted during the 1940s and 1950s, which aimed to subdue the Islamic community, and the sense of ever growing discrimination they caused among many Muslims, created a political context which some, including Muslims, sought to exploit to their own advantage. For example, several Muslim men in the Bosnian Krajina began to spread rumors that the authorities were planning on banning the practice of circumcision in 1954. The men who were most active in circulating these rumors then went from village to village charging a fee for mass circumcisions which Muslim families wanted performed.
taken by the Communist regime not to recognize the Muslims as an official nationality like Serbs, Croats, and others, which was perhaps the most important factor in creating the general framework for this sentiment. During the war, the Partisan leadership had treated Muslims in their propaganda as equal to Serbs, Croats and other nationalities which they sought to mobilize into their resistance movement. They urged Muslims to “fight for the freedom of the Muslim people,” and addressed them as “Brother Muslims!” in the exact same way as they addressed Serbs and Croats. 416 Despite this rhetoric, the postwar Communist regime rejected the specific ethnic individuality of Muslims and Muslim nationality as an official category. 417 The precise reasons for this reversal remain murky. Some scholars claim that many Communists remained under the influence of “Greater Serbian” and “Greater Croatian” ideologies, which held that Muslims were essentially a religious group whose members would eventually become either Serbs or Croats. 418 Others argue that pressure from the West to allow the participation of non-Communist parties in the immediate aftermath of the war resulted in highly nationalistic politicians forcefully arguing that Muslims did not constitute a special ethnic group and nationality. Their voices, when combined with Communist Party members, among them many Muslims, who felt the same way, ultimately resulted before the supposed ban went into effect. In reality, the government was planning on instituting a set of policies which were geared towards merely trying to regulate the practice of circumcision so that only qualified individuals would be able to perform it. On this case, see Krajina, “Vjerski običaj u špekulantske svrhe,” 1 October 1954, 1-2.

416 On how the Communist Party of Yugoslavia acknowledged the special ethnic individuality of Muslims during the war in language that was virtually indistinguishable from what it used in propaganda aimed at Serbs, Croats and other groups considered to be “nations” [narodi], see Purivatra, “Stav Komunističke partije Jugoslavije prema nacionalnom pitanju Muslimana u toku Narodnooslobodilačkog rata,” in Purivatra, Nacionalni i politički razvitak Muslimana, 108, 76.

417 Filandra, Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću, 205.

418 Ibid.
in Muslims not being recognized as a nationality like Serbs and Croats. Whatever the reason for this policy, the only official category available to Muslims in the 1946 constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina was as “nationally undeclared muslims” [nacionalni neopredeljeni muslimani], with “muslims” notably being spelled with a lowercase “m.”420 The non-recognition of Muslims as a nationality did not merely produce a feeling among many of being discriminated against; it also brought about a profound sense of confusion when it came to categorizing themselves in public life.422 For example, in the first postwar census of 1948, Muslims were permitted to declare themselves in one of only three possible ways: as a “Serb-muslim” [Srbo-musliman], a “Croat-muslim” [Hrvat-musliman] or an “undeclared muslim” [neopredeljen musliman].

The next census of 1953 did away with these categories and introduced a new one: “Yugoslav undeclared” [Jugosloven neopredeljen]. These ever changing and confusing categories were, in essence, engineered to reflect the dominant thinking at the

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419 Bojić, Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka, 226. Some of the high level personalities in the Communist Party who were against the recognition of Muslims as a nationality were Milovan Đilas, Moša Pijade, Petar Stambolić, Sreten Žujović, Andrija Hebrang, Vladimir Bakarić, Večeslav Holjevac, Edvard Kardelj, Avdo Humo, and Osman Karabegović.

420 Ibid., 227

421 Two of the most outspoken critics in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Communist regime’s decision to not recognize Muslims as a nationality were Husaga Čišić and Muhamed Hadžijahić. On their activities in advocating for the recognition a Muslim nationality and their protests to the Communist regime, see Filandra, Bosnička politika u XX. stoljeću, 206-207. For very general information on the “rebellion” that apparently resulted among some Muslims when the regime decided to not treat them as a distinct nationality, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. bez broja, Razni napis koi se odnose na neke aktuelne probleme nacionalnih odnosa u Jugoslaviji, 1969, “Način kako mi postavili pitanja poslije rata,” (author unknown), 141.

422 Ibid., 142; Muslim children frequently did not know how to declare themselves when asked to do so in school. And when they did say either “Serb” or “Croat,” then their responses often elicited unpleasant responses from from Serbs (when they declared themselves as Croats), as well as from Croats (when they declared themselves as Serbs). See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 17, Međunacionalni i međuvjerski odnosi u Bosni i Hercegovini i njihov uticaj na vaspitanje školske omladine, April 1958, 9.

time in the highest echelons of the Communist Party, as expressed by Politburo member Moša Pijade in 1952: “There is no reason for the religious designation ‘Muslim’ to be further connected with a nationality of ‘Muslim’.”

But the dominance in everyday life, as well as the political relevance of the category “Muslim,” could not be done away with so easily. While the category officially disappeared from public life, higher-level Party organs continued to specifically ask their lower-lever committees for precise information on how many Muslims were members, and how they declared themselves nationally. Muslims did not have the status of a nationality, and the official categories available to them were changing every few years. Yet it appears that the Communist Party, behind closed doors, still paradoxically continued to treat them as a coherent entity. One effect of the decision to not recognize Muslims as a nation was that in some regions, like Kulen Vakuf, many Muslims ended up declaring themselves nationally as Serbs, despite the fact that some Serbs had murdered large numbers of Muslims during the war.

A final area in which the Communist regime’s policies left many of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina with an overarching sense that they were discriminated


425 For examples from the Bosnian Krajina and the Bihać region, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, KP BiH, Oblasni komitet Banja Luka, Org.-instruktorsko odjeljenje, 21 June 1950, 1; Ibid., KP BiH, Sreski komitet Bihać, Mjesečni statistički izvještaj, 2 June 1950, 1. The Central Committe of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina would periodically compile data on how Muslims throughout the republic declared themselves. On these figures, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. bez broja, Ukupan broj Muslimana (it’s not clear if the “M” in “Muslimani” was written in the title of the document in a capital or lowercase “m” as the whole title was typed in capital letters) članova SK prema popisu 31.III.1958. i njihovo nacionalno opredeljenje, 1958.

426 In 1958, for example, the Central Committee noted that in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf there were fifty two Muslim members of the League of Communists. Thirty five declared themselves as Serbs and seventeen as Croats. See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. bez broja, Ukupan broj Muslimana članova SK prema popisu 31.III.1958. i njihovo nacionalno opredeljenje, 1958.
against was its investigations of war crimes and trials of suspected war criminals. Already by 30 November 1943, the Presidency of the Anti-fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia had taken the decision to form a commission to investigate war crimes.\(^{427}\) As sketched out at that time, its main objectives were to determine the number of people killed during war, the manner in which they were killed, and to evaluate the material losses that Yugoslavia suffered as a result of the war. Gathering such facts was crucial in any attempt to seek restitution and reparations. The commission’s organ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as the Land Commission for the Determining of the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborations \([Zemaljska \text{ komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača]}\) began its work before the war was over, on 1 July 1944. Its main objective was to “determine the responsibility of all individuals, whether with the occupiers or their collaborators, who are responsible for war crimes committed against the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”\(^{428}\)

Setting the tone for how such a task was to be completed was the work of the State Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators \([Državna \text{ komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača}]}\), the federal commission which held responsibility for investigating war crimes throughout Yugoslavia. Its focus was overwhelmingly on crimes that the various occupying forces, such as the Germans and Italians, had committed during the war. This perspective


\(^{428}\) Ibid., 52.
reflected the commission’s political agenda, which was to assemble a case for postwar reparations by showing that the country had suffered devastating losses as a result of war crimes which the occupying Axis armies had committed. Illustrating this position were the types of war crimes that the State commission chose to publish reports about. Out of the ninety detailed reports which were released to the public, more than seventy were directly related to war crimes which occupying armies had committed in Yugoslavia.429

When it came to war crimes which domestic Yugoslav “collaborators” had committed, the State Commission seems to have been most interested in investigating and publicizing how the Chetniks had collaborated with the occupying forces, as well as their crimes against Partisans.430 These investigations fit the Communist regime’s political objective of settling scores with the Chetniks and portraying them as “traitors and enemies of the people.” The State Commission publicized very few investigations of the large number of mass killings of civilians, who were often murdered in acts of localized violence on the basis of nationality and confession. Those it did highlight were, for the most part, a handful of notorious massacres of Serbs which the Ustasha had carried out, such as the massacre inside and nearby the Serbian Orthodox Church in Glina (in Croatia) in 1941.431 The only other mass killings of civilians which the State Commission devoted any serious attention to in its publications were those of Jews, about

429 See AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 31, Saopštenja br. 1-6 o zločinima italijanskih i nemačkih okupatora (Beograd: Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača, 1944); Saopštenja 7-33 o zločinima okupatora i njihovih pomogača (Beograd: Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača, 1945); Saopštenja 34-53 o zločinima okupatora i njihovih pomogača (Beograd: Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača, 1945); Saopštenja 66-93 o zločinima okupatora i njihovih pomogača (Beograd: Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača, 1945).

430 Ibid.

431 On this case, see in Ibid., Saopštenje br. 33, Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomogača, 376-390.

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which it issued a separate and lengthy report in 1952 published by the Association of
Jewish municipalities of Yugoslavia [Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije].

The thousands of Muslims who Serb insurgents and Chetniks had murdered
during the war were conspicuous in the State Commission’s published investigations by
their overall absence. The major instance in which some of the mass killings of Muslims
came to public light in the early postwar years was during the trial of Dragoljub
Mihajlović, the commander of the Chetniks whom the Communist authorities
apprehended in 1946. The bulk of the trial focused on Chetnik crimes against the
Partisans. When it came time to detail the killings which the Chetniks had perpetrated
against non-combatants, the prosecution endeavored to equalize the victims and obscured
the reasons which led Chetniks to kill them: “Chetnik bands carried out the mass
slaughter of the Croat, Muslim, as well as the Serb population who did not accept the
occupation.” This formulation ignored the fact that Chetniks had directly targeted
Muslims in many regions for near total expulsion and extermination, a policy they had
never applied in the same way to Croats and Serbs. Nonetheless, the trial did bring to
light several of the mass killings of Muslims in eastern Bosnia, and, in the end,
Mihajlović and several other Chetnik leaders were found guilty of these war crimes,
among many others. But this case was an exception rather than the norm. The vast
majority of the charges against Mihajlović and his collaborators had nothing to do with

432 See Zdenko Levetal, ed., Zločini fašističkog okupatora i njihovih pomogača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji

433 AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 824, Vrhovni sud Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije—Vojno veće,
Suđenje Dragoljuba-Draže Mihajlović i drugih, 31 May-1 June 1946 and 10-11 June 1946, 5.

434 Some of the more well-known locations where Chetniks murdered Muslims that were mentioned in the
trial materials were Foča, Goradže, and Čajnica. See in Ibid., 16-17.
the killing of Muslims. He was portrayed as more a traitor and enemy of the Communist regime than as the leader of a Serbian nationalist resistance, and later, collaborationist movement that sought to cleanse Muslims and other non-Serbs from Yugoslavia through extreme violence.435

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Land Commission that investigated war crimes seems to have placed special emphasis on the crimes committed by Ustashas during the war, which were among the most numerous in the republic. By March of 1947, out of 1,686 confirmed war criminals which the Land Commission had identified and, it seems, prosecuted, 1,277 appear to have been Ustashas, although it is not clear how many were Croats and how many were Muslims. Only 238 confirmed war criminals were of Serbian nationality, and were mostly likely Chetniks, while the rest had been members of various occupying armies. All of these individuals who were found guilty were but a fraction of the total number of 33,803 suspected of having committed grave war crimes.436 Clearly, the Land Commission was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to investigate and prosecute all suspected war criminals.437

The District Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their collaborators [Okružna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomogača]

435 On the specific charges against Mihajlović and his collaborators, see in Ibid., 1-6.

436 AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 49, Izvještaj Predsjedništva vlade Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomogača, 29 March 1947, 1. The figures of confirmed war criminals by nationality are as follows: 96 Germans, 68 Italians, 2 Hungarians, 1 Russian, 1 Arab, 238 Serbs, and 1,277 Croats.

437 Between the years 1945-1956, UDBA officers and their civilian collaborators executed 1,914 Ustashas and 3,184 Chetniks, and put on trial and punished another 1,228 Ustashas, 1,224 Chetniks and 12,861 “accomplices” [jataci]. On these figures, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljske aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 13-14.
which had responsibility for the Kulen Vakuf region was based in the city of Bihać. As the German and Italian armies had been far less active in the area during the war than in other parts of Yugoslavia, the District Commission devoted the bulk of its attention to investigating wartime atrocities which the Ustasahas had committed against Serbs. These made up the vast majority of the war crimes in the region.\textsuperscript{438} Most of the trials of Ustasha war criminals in the Bihać region took place in the immediate aftermath of the war, but, as Ustasahas were captured from their hiding places, or as their real identities came to light, occasional trials continued to be held all the way into the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{439} In the Kulen Vakuf region, the commission’s staff conducted investigations, mostly during the spring and summer of 1946, into the mass killings of Serbs during the war. The representatives of the commission worked with local Serbs, as well as with some Muslims and Croats, and together collected an extensive number of testimonies by eyewitnesses of Ustasha war crimes and survivors of mass killings.\textsuperscript{440} The reports they then compiled cited the names of the men in the region who had been Ustasahas, and, often in graphic detail, recounted the killings they had committed, as well as what

\textsuperscript{438} For the documentation of the commission’s work on detailing Ustasha war crimes in the Bihać region, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 493, dos. br. 4942, Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 18 September 1945; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 21 September 1945; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 28 September 1945; Zapisnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 7 August 1946; Ibid., kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Grupne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 4944, Zapisnik Zapisnik sastavljen pred Zemaljskom za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača u Bihaću srez Bihać okrug Bihać, 20 June 1945; Zapisnik o saslušanju svjedoka, Delić Rasim, 6 June 1945; Zapisnik sastavljen pred Zemaljskom za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača u Bihaću srez Bihać okrug Bihać, Ćurić Živko, 3 February 1945.

\textsuperscript{439} On the capture and trials of Ustasha war criminals in the Bihać region during the mid to late 1950s, see Krajina, “Uhićen ustaški ratni zločinac,” 1 February 1955, 3; “Suđenje ustaškom ratnom zločincu Josip Šantiću,” 1 September 1955, 4, 6; “Sudska hronika. Održano suđenje ustaškom zločinu,” 2 February 1958, 7.

\textsuperscript{440} For example, the file for the commission’s work in the village of Rajinovci, located not far from Kulen Vakuf, contains 147 individual testimonies about war crimes. See AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946. Most other files contain a similar number of testimonies.
property they had stolen and destroyed. A number of the reports included partial lists of the Serbs who the Ustashas had murdered.\textsuperscript{441} The District Court then used this information in its efforts to try suspected Ustasha war criminals. Documents demonstrate that at least six Muslims from Kulen Vakuf and Orašac were put on trial in 1946 and stood accused of having committed war crimes against Serbs. In every case the accused were found guilty, and the court asked for the harshest punishment possible, either the death sentence or the maximum prison term available.\textsuperscript{442} Apparently, some of these Muslims may have been falsely accused of having committed war crimes as Ustashas by local Serbs who, for reasons unknown, had personal scores to settle with them. Avdo Burzić, for example, was found guilty of having been an Ustasha, and of having committed war crimes, on the basis of a testimony given by a Serb named Branko Kovačević. Burzić served somewhere between 11-19 years of his prison sentence before being granted early release. When he returned to Kulen Vakuf he apparently went into one of the local taverns and encountered a Serb from the nearby village of Kalati.

\textsuperscript{441} For the reports compiled which cover Ustasha war crimes committed in the Kulen Vakuf region, see in Ibid., Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtočće, 31 July 1946; Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; Ibid., kut. 67, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 12, Mjesni odbor: Krajjeuša, 29 July 1946; kut. 91, Zapisnik sastavljen kod NOO-a Martin Brod, October 1944; kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen kod Sreskog suda u Drvaru, 12 December 1945; Ibid., Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Saslušanje Vladimira Tanosića po masovnom ubistvu u selu Boricićevac dana 24.VII.1941, 28 March 1945.

\textsuperscript{442} On these cases, see AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946; dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmut, 26 August 1946; dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanoić Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; dos. br. Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujaga, 15 October 1946.
Surprised to see Burzić, he asked: “Avdo, where’ve you been all these years!?” Burzić replied: “I was in jail because someone said I killed you during the war.”

While Muslims from the region were justly, and some perhaps sometimes falsely, sent to prison or executed for having been Ustasha war criminals, the Serb insurgents who committed the September 1941 massacres of Muslims were never held accountable for their crimes. This was not the result, however, of the District Commission’s lack of information about the murder of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley. In spite of the fact that the District commission never conducted an official investigation into the massacres, a substantial amount of information about what happened nonetheless emerged as officials carried out their investigations into other wartime events in the region. For example, the local councils that investigated war crimes in the village of Kalati and town of Kulen Vakuf both included relevant information in their reports on the September 1941 massacres which witnesses provided. The council in Kalati, while drastically overestimating the numbers of Muslims, indicated that 11,000—what it considered to be the entire population of Kulen Vakuf, Orašac, Klisa, and several other smaller villages—had left the region with Vladimir Veber in September 1941. Along the way the Ustashas and Domobrani who were leading them became engaged in battles with the insurgents. It was said that 5,000 of the Muslims eventually arrived in Bihać, while the insurgents captured and killed the remaining 6,000. The report provided a list of twenty five men, women and children from Klisa and Ostrovica who were killed. This list included their ages, and indicated that nine of those killed were children between one and six years of age.

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443 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. For another example of a Muslim from the Kulen Vakuf region who may have been falsely accused of having been an Ustasha during the war, see Kurtagić, *Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu*, 29.
age. Another list indicated that three Croats from the village of Poljica were killed, and yet another revealed that thirteen women and children between the ages of four and fortyeight had thrown themselves into the Una River and drowned out of fear of being caught by the insurgents.444

Aside from the drastic exaggeration in the report of 6,000 Muslim victims and the very partial listing of the those killed, much of the rest of the information was accurate and valuable in terms of the specificity of names, ages, and manner of death of the victims. The report concluded: “A large number of innocent civilians were killed during those days. This was during the first days of the insurgency and the politics of the enemy had divided the people into two camps, and so the first victims were, for the most part, innocent civilians who, by the circumstances, were caught with the occupying army and were considered to be the enemy.” It is significant that the report referred to the Muslim victims as “innocent civilians” who happened to have been caught with “the enemy.” The Muslim victims were not depicted as collaborators, traitors, or Ustashas, and thus were not to be lumped together with losses that “the enemy” suffered. Nonetheless, the report’s interpretation of the massacres sidestepped the issue of responsibility for the killings by placing blame on “the politics of the enemy,” that is, on the Ustaschas and Domobrani, for having been caught with the rest of the innocent Muslim civilians. Nowhere did the report seek to place guilt with the Serb insurgents who did the actual killing, nor did it explore their motivations for having done so. Despite these distortions, the document nonetheless indicated that the killings of innocent

444 AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, 6-7.

445 Ibid.
Muslims had taken place, and thus provided the District Commission with official evidence of the massacres.

Another report, which the council for Kulen Vakuf produced in its investigations of war crimes, offered the District Commission similarly useful information. It summarized the September 1941 massacres in a very brief paragraph which provided some crucial and relatively accurate facts, specifically with regards to the number of Muslim victims.

On the hill near Ćovka, severe and violent battles broke out between the insurgents and the Domobrani. In these battles around 2,000 souls were killed, the majority of whom were Muslims, according to people from (Donji) Lapac and the testimony of Nino Kovačević. A large number of the people were captured by the insurgents who killed many of them. The insurgents were of a “Chetnik disposition” [četnički nastrojeni]. Following this paragraph, the final sentence of the report was identical to that in the report from Kalati, which described the victims as “innocent civilians” who were killed because of “the politics of the enemy.” Yet again, this passive construction, “were killed,” helped to obscure the identity of those who had committed the massacres, that is, the Serb insurgents. Still, the quotation cited above nonetheless indicates that the District Commission knew who did the killing, as exemplified in the sentence: “A large number of the people [i.e., the Muslims] were captured by the insurgents who killed many of them.” The report’s characterization of the insurgents as being of a “Chetnik disposition” was provocative given the fact that sizable numbers of Chetniks had never existed in the Kulen Vakuf region, and that the vast majority of the insurgents in question had become Partisans by the end of the war. In neither of the reports was there any proposal for

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446 Ibid., Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946, 5.
447 On the District Commission’s documentation about war crimes that Chetniks committed in the greater Kulen Vakuf region, which included collaboration with the Italians and stealing of livestock which
further investigation of the killings or for any prosecution of those responsible for having committed them, despite the clear designation of the Muslims killed as “innocent victims.” Both reports, while very brief, nevertheless offered the District Commission a general sense of the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, although the reasons as to why the insurgents killed so many of them remained hazy.

A final document passed through the hands of those working in the District Commission which shows how some Muslims who worked in the local councils investigating war crimes attempted to document the September 1941 massacres, even though they were never officially instructed to do so. Husein Kadić and Aijša Altić from Kulen Vakuf, who lost multiple members of their extended families in the mass killings, created a unique, hand-written document which included the only testimonies by survivors of the massacres which exist in the Land Commission’s archive. Most likely produced sometime in 1946, the document consists of only two testimonies, one from Ajiša Altic, and the other from Zejna Kadić. Altić, a twenty-four year old secretary in the local government office in Kulen Vakuf, described how “unknown peasants,” whom she referred to as “Chetniks,” stopped her and the rest of the Muslims while they were attempting to flee to Bihać. Once they returned to Kulen Vakuf, she remembered that “there, on the bridge, I saw with my own eyes how those who had forced us back cut the throats of ten men from Kulen Vakuf and Orašac.”448 Later she noted that all men and boys older than twelve were lined up two across and taken to Martin Brod. She

Chetniks then sold to the Germans, see in Ibid., kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Grupne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-622, Javno tužište za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Mirković Koste i Mirković Rajka, 30 September 1946, 1; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevco, 9 August 1946, 2.

448 ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 88, Srez Drvar, Selo Boričevac, Svjedočenje Altić Ajiše i Kadić Zejne, handwritten and undated document, 1.
eventually heard from a Muslim man named Osman, who had apparently managed to escape from the column at some point, that all the men and boys were taken to the Golubnjača pit and slaughtered.449

Zejna Kadić, a forty-nine year old woman from Kulen Vakuf, testified that she saw “the Chetnik Mane Rovkić,” along with several others, take away a number of Muslim men who they had captured near the Serbian village of Prkosi. She later heard that they had killed every one of them. After the war, on 11 January 1946, Mehmed Alagić told her that he had spoken with a Serb named Mile Grubiša. This man said that he had seen with his own eyes how Jovica Medić, a Serb from the village of Bubanj, had led a group of Serb peasants from Lika during the massacres, and that one of them had sliced off the head of Zejna’s husband.450

These two testimonies were written in the same style as others recorded from Serbs in the area who had suffered at the hands of the Ustashas. It seems that Kadić and Altić were attempting to create a document that was no different from any other which the local commissions investigating war crimes were producing at the time. This suggests that they considered the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley to have been as important as the other investigations of mass killings which were being conducted in the region. Their document, however, was unique in one respect. While many other testimonies taken from Serbs were hand-written, nearly all were recorded on an official form which the District Commission distributed to its investigators in the localities. However, the testimonies of these two Muslim women were written on a blank

449 Ibid.

450 Ibid.
sheet of paper. This may have simply indicated a lack of official forms in the region. But it also may suggest the somewhat clandestine nature of recording facts about a highly sensitive war crime for which no governmental organ had ordered an official investigation.

The location of the document in the archive for the Land Commission also raises questions. It was not found along with other the materials preserved from the commission’s work in the Kulen Vakuf region, but rather in a box with documents related to the Croatian village of Boričevac. How it ended up there is impossible to know. It may have simply been an archivist’s error, since the document is hand-written and not easy to read, and without much basic information, such as a date and place of origin. To recognize its importance, one needs to be familiar with the last names of Muslims from Kulen Vakuf to realize that Altić and Kadić were women from the region. Most importantly, one would need to know something about the massacres in order to grasp the significance of their testimonies. The archivists were perhaps unaware of such information. It is possible that there were more testimonies that the commission in Kulen Vakuf created, but may have been purposefully destroyed once they were sent to the District Commission in Bihać, or perhaps later once in the hands of the Land Commission in Sarajevo. The exceptionally delicate political nature of the massacres may have resulted in instructions to throw out such testimonies for fear of how the information would affect the men who had committed the killings. This document, filed away in the wrong box, may have been the only one that survived out of what may have been numerous testimonies about the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley.
Testimonies of Ajiša Altić and Zejna Kadić. Source: ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 88, Srez Drvar, Selo Borićevac, Svjedočenje Altić Ajiše i Kadić Zejne, handwritten and undated document (most likely 1945 or 1946), 1.
Whatever the case, the existence of such materials clearly indicates that the District Commission for the Bihać region, and the Land Commission for all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had at least partial information about the September 1941 massacres. The fact that no investigation was ever conducted therefore cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge: it was a conscious choice which the authorities made. This decision contributed to the creation of the idea that it was a handful of “Chetnik elements,” mixed in among the insurgents—and not large numbers of insurgents who eventually became Partisans—who were those responsible for murdering nearly 2,000 innocent Muslim civilians. Several Party members articulated this position during a meeting in Bihać in 1951 as they discussed the wartime history of Kulen Vakuf:

There was a lot of stealing, burning, and killing of the innocent population by Chetnik elements…there were rapes. This was the result of the desire for revenge for the burning and violence that the Ustashas had carried out against the Serbian villages. But later these thieving elements fell out of our ranks and became Chetniks, and the struggle was taken up against them just as with the Ustashas.\[^{451}\]

Taking revenge against the Muslims of the Ljutoč was certainly a crucial element in what motivated the insurgents in carrying out the mass killings. But this formulation made it seem that those who committed the massacres had always been “Chetnik elements” that, at a certain point, left the Partisan ranks. It ignored the fact that sizable numbers of Serb insurgents who committed the killings never left “our ranks.” These men had instead become Partisan fighters.

The authorities therefore knew about the massacres, and had acknowledged the victims as innocent. Yet already by the early 1950s they had begun to create an interpretation of the events of 6-8 September 1941 in which they sought to assign guilt

solely to so-called “Chetnik elements.” The existence of such an interpretation among Party members, however, did not mean that Serbs and Muslims living in, and nearby the Ljutoč valley were unaware of what happened during the war. Like the vast majority of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the early postwar years, they had intimate knowledge of local wartime killings in their region. They knew exactly who had killed whom, and quietly accepted the fact that many of those who had committed mass killings were now among the members of the Communist Party. As a report from the Communist Party in eastern Bosnia indicated in 1948: “There are many people who committed crimes during the war who today live camouflaged. This has a negative impact on the masses. People know what others did during the war, including those who are now Party members.”452 A major question thus emerges from this situation with regard to the massacres of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley in September 1941: If both the authorities and the rest of the population of the region knew what had happened, then why did everyone remain silent about the killings after the war?

Chapter Four

The Culture of Silence

The regional committee of the League of Communists in Bihać met on 6 June 1953 in order to discuss nominations which some of its members had recently made for *Narodni heroji*, or “People’s Heroes,” the most prestigious award possible for any former Partisan fighter. One name proposed was that of “Mile” Rade Blanuša, a Serb from the village of Dubovska, located in the hills which ring Mount Ljutoč, only a few kilometers from the northern end of the Ljutoč valley. Blanuša was said to have been an exceptionally brave fighter. But another more important reason existed why others present at the meeting felt strongly that he should be given the status of a People’s Hero:

> When the guerrillas were attacking the Ustasha command and taking villages, he worked for Brotherhood and Unity. He energetically fought against the killing of innocent Muslims in those moments when religious intolerance was strong. His efforts saved Muslim families and helped to create Brotherhood and Unity.\(^{453}\)

Blanuša had apparently been among the insurgents who had launched the initial assault on the Ustashes in control of the Ljutoč valley on 4 September 1941. He fought against the Ustashes, but, unlike many others, he protected innocent Muslims from the other Serb insurgents who were determined to massacre them all. This discussion about whether or not to award him the title of “People’s Hero” was a rare occasion when members of the League of Communists in the region mentioned the massacres of 6-8 September 1941 during the postwar years. In this case, the indirect reference to the mass killings served merely as the backdrop to a more important debate over whether or not a Partisan fighter who had worked for Brotherhood and Unity during the war deserved a prestigious award.

\(^{453}\) AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 145, SK SK BiH Bihać, Prijedlog za Narodne heroje, 6 June 1953, 1.
The massacres themselves—that is, the identities of victims, those of perpetrators, and the reasons for the killings—never received any direct attention.

The vast majority of time, the dominant type of communication about the massacres was silence. This should not be confused with “forgetting,” which would imply the absence of historical knowledge and memory about the mass killings. In the Ljutoč valley, nearly everyone knew what had taken place in 1941. The events were simply too cataclysmic and traumatic to be so quickly forgotten. What emerged during the postwar years was a result of a particular political and social context in which certain groups enforced a public silence about the massacres while other groups chose to be silent. The term silence, therefore, should be not be understood as simply the absence of communication about the events of 1941; rather, it was the conscious choice by people not to talk about the massacres, about which they had intimate knowledge, because of a certain constellation of social, political, and psychological factors that made it virtually impossible to speak publicly about the killings. This led during the initial years after the war to the formation of a public culture of silence about the massacres, which crystallized in several distinct ways and for a number of reasons.454

The first and most basic element in this public culture of silence became visible immediately after the war when Muslim refugees began returning to the Ljutoč valley. The local authorities apparently prohibited them from exhuming and burying the bodies of their relatives and neighbors who the Serb insurgents had murdered. While no specific directive exists in the archives which shows this to have been official governmental

454 On the notion of silence as a form of communication, and how it often becomes dominant in the aftermath of traumatic events when no social and political framework exists to support alternative modes of expression, see Wajnryb, *The Silence*, 96; on the concepts of “being silenced” and “being silent,” see Fivush, “Speaking Silence,” 88-98.
policy, Muslims in the region testify that looking for bodies was explicitly banned, and that doing so would have been very risky, and would have resulted in some form of punishment.\textsuperscript{455} The issue of the bodies of the Muslims was a politically sensitive one for the local authorities in the Ljutoč valley. Many of those who had carried out the killings, as well as their commanding officers, who had either participated or opposed the killings, but were nonetheless in positions of authority when the massacres took place had, for the most part, become Partisans during the war. After the war, many of these individuals occupied positions of authority in the postwar organs of local government. For example, in 1952, the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was formed and its president was a former insurgent and Partisan named Jovo Reljić from Martin Brod.\textsuperscript{456} He had apparently been present, and perhaps even participated, in deciding which among the Muslim men and boys were to be murdered at Golubnjača.\textsuperscript{457} Nikola Karanović, the insurgent commander from the village of Ćovka, and the man who had led the initial attack on the column of Ustaschas, Domobrani and the Muslim refugees whom they were leading, had become a general in the Yugoslav People’s Army.\textsuperscript{458} Many others had become Party members and more than a few had become army officers. To exhume the bodies of the Muslims murdered in the September massacres, for whose deaths these individuals, as well as

\textsuperscript{455} Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf; Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać; Derviš Dervišević on 1 and 5 October 2008 in Klisa; Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

\textsuperscript{456} ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Predlog zakona o podjeli teritorije Narodne republike Bosne i Hercegovine na srezove, gradove i opštine, 1952, 6.

\textsuperscript{457} Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. For basic biographical information on Jovo Reljić, see AUSK, SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 172, biografski podaci, Jovo Reljić, 14 February 1959, 2.

\textsuperscript{458} For a brief biographical sketch of Nikola Karanović, see Krajina, “Likovi boraca iz revolucije. Nikola Karanović,” 1 June 1961, 5.
many others, were directly and indirectly responsible, would be to directly call into question their positions of authority in postwar society. Specifically, it would inevitably raise the issue as to whether or not such individuals should be prosecuted as war criminals. The fact that the Partisans in the region were composed of significant numbers of fighters who had committed atrocities against Muslims early on in the war meant that any exhumation of Muslim victims held the potential to implicate Partisan veterans, many of whom had become postwar authority figures. Exhumations of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, like those in the vast majority of other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were therefore expressly forbidden.459

The absence of bodies, which made burial and the practice of traditional death rituals nearly impossible, had a destructive impact on creating any kind of coherent culture of remembrance for the victims of the 1941 massacres. No body ensured that there would be no funeral, and no funeral meant that the traditional death rituals could not be practiced in the home as well as at the gravesite, which was also generally absent.460

459 Even if people had been permitted exhume the remains of the Muslims who had been massacred in September 1941, the chaotic and spread-out nature of the killings would have made such a task virtually impossible to fully complete. Many of the Muslims who survived the massacres and returned to the Ljutoč valley did not even know where many of the bodies were located, aside from those murdered at Golubnjača.

460 At the center of these rituals is the dženaza, or Muslim burial ceremony. This includes the washing of the corpse, which is later wrapped in a white shroud and then placed in lidless coffin. It is covered with a green cloth with the Islamic profession of faith written on it in Arabic: “There is no God except for the one Allah.” On such practices, see Bringa, Being Muslim the Bosnian Way, 163, 184-185. In some cases, out of fear of the “evil intentions” of the souls of the deceased, as well as out of a desire to assist the souls in their journey to “the other world,” the living engage in pagan practices, such as pouring out all fluids from the house of the dead, or by refusing to bathe until the deceased has been washed and buried. On these beliefs and practices, see Radmila Kajmaković, “Neki arhaični elementi u pogrebnim običajima Muslimana u Bosni,” separati, Rad XI-og Kongresa Saveza foklorista Jugoslavije u Novom Vinodolskom, Zagreb, 1964, 355-356. The burial is carried out with the recital of prayers according to sharia rules, and more prayers and commemorations, called the tevhid, are carried out five times after an individual’s death, taking place on the seventh and fortieth days after death (when the soul is believed to leave the body) and again after six months and one year. On these religious practices, see Bringa, Being Muslim the Bosnian Way, 187-188. According to Antun Hangi, Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a grave [mezara] and often two gravestones [nišani]. On the specific size and style of these gravestones, see Antun Hangi, Život i
Some Muslims did erect *nišani*, or gravestones, for their victims even though they had no bodies to bury in the ground underneath them. The inscriptions they carved on them illuminated the postwar political context in which silence about the massacres was mandatory. One referred to the victim as simply “Killed in 1941” [*Poginuo 1941*]. Those who did the killing and the location of the victim’s death remained unknown. Another hinted at the impossibility of gathering the remains of the victims: “Killed in 1941, For His Unknown Body” [*Poginuo 1941, za njegovo neznano tijelo*].

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*običaji Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990 [1906]), 197-198. These rituals, based in Islamic practice, as well as on centuries-old pagan traditions, were essential elements in the culture of remembrance for the dead among the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley.

461 Photographs taken of gravestones in the Muslim cemeteries in Kulen Vakuf and Klisa during September and October 2008.
A gravestone in the village of Klisa for what appears to have been a victim of the September massacres. The inscription indicates that the deceased was killed in 1941 and that the location of his body is “unknown.” Photograph taken on 27 September 2008.

It appears, however, that most survivors did not take this step of building gravestones without the remains of their relatives. This ensured that the remembrance of the Muslims whom the Serb insurgents had massacred was much more likely to become something abstract, something that lacked essential and crucial elements of the traditional mourning process which Muslims in the region had practiced for centuries. How could it have been possible to remember the dead when the dead had no physical presence? As the anthropologist Katherine Verdery has observed, “a body’s materiality can be critical
to its symbolic efficacy.” It is a body’s “corporeality,” its “thereness,” that gives it a special power as a means to making a claim, and especially its capacity to enable the living to make a claim for the remembrance of the dead. The lack of any of the remains of the Muslims whom the Serb insurgents massacred in September 1941 deprived the surviving Muslims of the valley of victims’ bodies, which were the crucial physical symbols for their remembrance. This greatly impaired their capacity to engage in concrete acts of remembrance. The absence of bodies, which was a direct result of governmental policy, was therefore a fundamental cornerstone in the creation of a public culture of silence about the massacres.

A second important element of the creation of the silence was the fact that there were no postwar investigations of the killings, and therefore no trials were ever held for those responsible. The District Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators ordered extensive investigations to be carried out of the crimes which Croatian and Muslim Ustahas had committed against Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region. But no similar investigation was ever conducted into the mass killings of

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463 The prohibition of searching for, and burying the remains of their relatives and neighbors was a traumatic experience for many Muslims. Not knowing where their bones were, and not being able to erect a grave was exceptionally painful for many of the survivors. The absence of such a site deprived them of a concrete place where they could pray for the souls of the dead and engage in ritual acts of mourning. Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 5 October 2008 in Klisa.

464 On the District Commission’s work in investigating Ustasha war crimes against Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region, see AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946; dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmut, 26 August 1946; dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujaga, 15 October 1946; Ibid., kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtoče, 31 July 1946; Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 20,
Muslims from the Ljutoč valley. In some regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was extremely difficult to obtain information about the mass killings of Muslims because literally no survivors remained to tell what had happened. In other instances, the handful of survivors that did manage to escape never returned to their home villages after the war, and thus no one was available to tell about the mass killings. This greatly hindered the capacity of investigators who may have wished to document the war crimes which had taken place.

But these problems did not exist in the Kulen Vakuf region. Hundreds of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley had managed to survive the September massacres, and large numbers of them had returned home immediately after the war to rebuild their villages. Scores of people, therefore, were available to testify about the mass killings. And yet, the information about the massacres which the District Commission eventually obtained came into its hands in spite of the fact that no investigation was ever ordered. Yet again, the main roadblock was the fact that sizable numbers of Serb insurgents who participated in the attack on the Ljutoc valley in September 1941 had become Partisans during the course of the war. While a number had done their best to protect the Muslims from the revenge-seeking insurgents and peasants, others were directly and indirectly responsible for the massacres. Most of these individuals, like Rade Medić “Pitar” from Martin Brod, who had apparently raped and killed Muslim women in the cornfields in

Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946; kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; kut. 91, Zapisnik sastavljen kod NOO-a Martin Brod, October, 1944; kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen kod šreskog suda u Drvaru, 12 December 1945; Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Saslušanje Vladimira Tankosića po masovnim ubistvom u selu Boričevac dana 24.VII.1941, 28 March 1945.

465 Tucaković, Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima, 16.
Kulen Vakuf before killing their children, had become Party members either during the war or in the early postwar years.\(^{466}\) Not infrequently, they had taken up positions in the local government, and some had risen to high-ranking positions in the Yugoslav People’s Army. Investigating the massacres of the Muslims from the Ljtutoč valley would have meant investigating the war crimes which these men had committed, men who were now among those who staffed the local government and military in the region. Carrying out such an investigation was politically impossible for the District Commission.

The result of this decision was that the survivors of the massacres had no choice but to endure regular encounters in daily life during the postwar years with a number of the individuals who had participated in the mass killings. In some cases, they would repeatedly run into the person who had literally tried to kill them and their families. These encounters sometimes resulted in brief and surreal exchanges between the survivors and perpetrators of the massacres, which were often re-traumatizing for the survivors. One Muslim woman remembered how a Serb by the name of Nikola came to her house not long after the war. As an official with the local government, he was responsible for conducting a census of how many people lived in the region. She immediately recognized him as one of the Serbs who had murdered several members of her family. At her doorstep, he posed the matter-of-fact question, “How many people are there in this house?” She responded: “You should know…you slaughtered them!”\(^{467}\) Not long after the war, Mujo Dervišević, the sole survivor of the massacre of the Muslim

\(^{466}\) Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 32. Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 and 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. On Rade Pitar’s life as a Partisan veteran in Martin Brod after the war, see Krajina, “U Martin Brodu grade spomen dom omladine i boraca. Svjedočanstva o doprinosu NOR-u,” 26 May 1978, 4.

\(^{467}\) Interview with Bećo Pehivanović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać.
men and boys at Golubnjača, had a similar experience when he encountered the man who had stood poised to slit his throat at the pit just before he managed to escape. As he remembered the incident:

The war was over…so I employed myself in construction. I’m mixing the mortar, and I look down the road. I see some captain [in the Yugoslav People’s Army] who’s smiling, walking in my direction. He yells out, “Hello Mujo!” And then he offers me his hand. I’m looking and looking… “Why are you offering me that hand!? Did you forget that you wanted to use that hand to kill me and push me into the pit?! Yesterday you wanted to kill me and now “hello!” I don’t need your “hello.”

Other survivors, overcome by the traumatic memories which such encounters triggered, could not limit their response to mere words. Džafer Demirović was with his uncle one day in the centre of Kulen Vakuf not long after the end of the war, in 1946 or 1947. They were standing and talking with several other men in front of a tavern. An officer in the Yugoslav People’s Army approached them on a horse. He stopped near the men and then stared for a moment into the tavern. Demirović looked up and immediately recognized the man on the horse as Mile Pilipović, a former Serb insurgent who had murdered his grandfather. Pilipović apparently liked to drink and would sometimes tell stories in the taverns about what it was like to kill Muslims. He seemed to enjoy repeatedly telling a story about how difficult it was to kill Huso and Pašo Kosović because of their hard skulls. On this particular day Pilipović kicked the heels of his long leather boots into the sides of his horse and for some reason, perhaps to demonstrate his unchallengeable power as an army officer, tried to ride directly into the tavern. Demirović snapped and lunged at him, dragging him from the saddle, and knocking him to the ground. Had others not


469 Interview with Đula Seferović on 3 and 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.
intervened, he might have killed Pilipović right then and there. In such cases, a handful of survivors showed themselves, either through words or, on the rare occasion, a physical altercation, to be capable of directly engaging with those who had murdered or attempted to murder their relatives.

In most cases, however, encounters between perpetrators and survivors unfolded in an uncomfortable and eerie silence. One elderly Muslim woman who lived in Kulen Vakuf would on occasion run into the Serb woman who had tried to kill her by beating her with a stick. Both would walk past each other without saying a word. Other Muslim women had similar experiences of encountering Serb women who had attacked them during the massacres. They too passed by their would-be murderers in silence, pretending as if nothing had happened. Muslim men would sometimes go the many taverns in Kulen Vakuf and see Serbs who had participated in the massacres. They sat down at tables, ordered brandy or wine for themselves, and drank without saying a word to those who had killed their relatives and neighbors. Other Muslim men worked on the railroad in Kulen Vakuf with Serbs who murdered Muslims during the September massacres. Sead Kadić’s father worked each day with the Serb who had slaughtered his father. He never said a word to the man about what had happened during the war. Sometimes Muslims would see property which had belonged to them or their relatives

470 Interview with Mujo Demirović on 30 September 2008 in Bihać; Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Adem Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Klisa; Puškar, Krajiški Pečat, 96. Demirović, Bosna i Bošnjaci u srpskoj politici, 273.

471 Interview with anonymous informant on 24 September 2008.

472 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

473 Interview with Adem Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Klisa.

474 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.
before the war in the possession of Serbs, indicating that the Serbs in question had participated in the killings or had plundered the houses and bodies of the dead. Several years after the war a former Serb insurgent by the name of Jovo Medić apparently came into a tailor shop in Kulen Vakuf which a Muslim man owned. The son of the owner was named Mahmut and the insurgents had murdered him in the September massacres. When Medić arrived to pick up his pants, the owner of the shop recognized the watch he was wearing on his wrist. It had belonged to his son Mahmut before the massacres. He said nothing, but began to cry while staring at the watch. Medić quickly left the shop without taking his pants, and never returned.\footnote{Kurtagić, \textit{Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu}, 47. On other occasions, Muslims would see property from their farms and houses in the possession of Serbs, as was the case of with a Muslim who spotted his chicken coop in front a Serb’s house while passing through a Serbian village after the war. On this incident, see \textit{Ibid.}, 51.}

In general, what was remarkable about the majority of these encounters between survivors and perpetrators was that they took place in silence. Neither party would say anything to the other about the massacres. For the Muslim survivors, the encounters with these Serbs almost certainly had a re-traumatizing effect. Like war veterans hearing explosions or other sounds reminiscent of combat, the regular encounters with the perpetrators forced the survivors to re-experience the feelings of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation that they had initially faced in September 1941.\footnote{On how certain elements can re-trigger the initial “hyperarousal” of feelings that a traumatic experience initially produces, see Judith Lewis Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery. The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror} (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 35-36. Aside from the disturbing emotional aspects of the encounters, contact with those who had committed the killings, or who were in command of the insurgents when the killings took place, and seeing property which Serbs had stolen from
Muslims during the massacres, had another profound impact on the survivors. Seeing such individuals not only walking freely, but also in a number of cases holding positions of political authority, clearly communicated that those guilty for the massacres would never be held accountable for their crimes. These individuals, by virtue of their positions of authority and status as former Partisans, occupied a place in postwar society which essentially insulated them from any kind of punishment for their war crimes. This made it clear to the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley that speaking out about the massacres was not only out of the question, but also potentially dangerous, as the perpetrators of the killings had the power to punish those who might question their authority. The absence of any investigation of the September 1941 massacres, and the constant encounters between unpunished perpetrators and generally silent survivors, were thus crucial aspects in the creation of the public silence about the killings which crystallized after the war.

A third important element in the formation of the silence was the widespread notion among Serbs in the region that Kulen Vakuf was an ustaško mjesto, that is, an “Ustasha place.” This stereotype first emerged during the summer of 1941 when Serbs observed that several of the Ustashas who had participated in the mass killings of Serbs in the region had come from Kulen Vakuf. The idea then quickly spread that somehow all of the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf were somehow Ustashas, despite the fact that less than one percent of the Muslims from that town, as well as from the rest of the Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley, had volunteered to join the Ustasha units in the region.
From July-August 1941 onwards, Kulen Vakuf’s status as an “Ustasha place” steadily became more widespread among many Serbs in the region.477

Despite official acknowledgment in classified documents that the Muslims killed in the September massacres were innocent victims, this notion continued to mushroom and resonate after the war ended, and not only in the Kulen Vakuf region. Derviš Kurtagić, a Muslim from Kulen Vakuf who had fought as a Partisan, left after the war to study veterinarian medicine at the University of Zagreb. Upon hearing that he was originally from Kulen Vakuf, a young Serb woman who worked at the university apparently remarked: “That’s where 3,000 Ustashas were killed.”478 While completing their compulsory service in the Yugoslav People’s Army, young Muslim men from Kulen Vakuf suddenly learned about the reputation their region had among some Serb officers. On one occasion, while such an officer was giving his new conscripts a lecture on the importance of being aware of the mood of the local population, he made a point of

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477 On how seeing Muslims from Kulen Vakuf who participated in the killing of Serbs contributed to an overarching sense among Serbs that all Muslims in the region were Ustashas, see Bibanović, Sijedočanstvo jednog vremena, 54; Vukmanović, Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine, 130.

For the names of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley who joined the Ustashas, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić, Avde, 27 May 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmuta, 26 August 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; Ibid., dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujaga, 15 October 1946; Aj, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 531, dos. broj. 5361, Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtoče, 31 July 1946; Ibid., Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovci, 7 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946; ABiH, Fond Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača (ZKUZBiH), kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevce, 9 August 1946; Ibid., kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946.

478 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.
referring to Kulen Vakuf as an example of “an Ustasha place.” Other Muslims from the region who eventually joined the League of Communists had difficulties securing loans for building homes once it became known that they were from the Ljutoć valley. Those in charge of many government institutions apparently viewed them as suspect since they were considered to be “Ustasha” children from an “Ustasha” region. It appears that local residents who sought government approval for various plans to develop the economy of the valley sometimes ran into problems once Serb members of the League of Communists discovered where they were from. Apparently, more than a few high-level political figures in Bosnia and Herzegovina believed very strongly that certain regions in the republic were “Ustasha,” and several felt that Kulen Vakuf was among them. In the town itself, a Serb tavern owner by the name of Nikola Filipović felt the same way, as exemplified in his comment towards the end of 1958 when in a drunken state he yelled out to everyone who was sitting and drinking: “All you Muslims from Vakuf are Ustashas, and I know you from 1941.” This attitude was not limited to the taverns. Some Serb members of the League of Communists in the region were reported to have complained during meetings that it was difficult to enlarge the

479 Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo.
480 Interview with Mujo Demirović on 30 September 2008 in Bihać.
481 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.
482 Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać. On the attitude among some high-level members of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina that certain regions and villages of the republic were “Ustasha” or alternatively “Chetnik,” see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9, Neke pojave i problemi u međunacionalnim i vjerskim odnosima u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1959, 17; Ibid., kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljske aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 29.
membership of their organization beyond fellow Serbs because “the Muslims are Ustashas.”

This perception of Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place” became more visible in the region once the town was designated in 1952 as the centre of the new municipality of Kulen Vakuf, which included a number of Serbian villages. As had been the case since the end of the war, most of the political leadership in the region was Serb. Despite the fact that the offices for the new municipality were located in Kulen Vakuf, the vast majority of these men elected not to live in the town. Many preferred to live in Martin Brod which meant they needed to rise at 4:00 AM in order to catch the only morning train that would take them to work in the municipal office. Members of the League of Communists from Bihać who were sent to analyze the situation concluded that their decision not to live in Kulen Vakuf was rooted in “intolerance.” It appears that some of the Serbs who ran the municipality, such as the president Jovo Reljić, who was present in Martin Brod when the Muslim men and boys were taken to be murdered at Golubnjača in September 1941, may have refused to live in Kulen Vakuf out a sense of discomfort at the idea of living in what many Serbs in the region viewed as an “Ustasha place.” Instead, they preferred Martin Brod, an entirely Serbian village where the insurgency began during late July 1941.

They were not alone in this sentiment. By the mid 1950s, many Serb villagers in Martin Brod began to demand that their village belong to the Serbian-majority

484 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 7, Izvještaj o radu na brojnom jačanju organizacija Saveza komunista na opštinama Bihać, Bosanska Krupa, i Kulen Vakuf, 15 June 1959, 41.

municipality of Drvar and not Kulen Vakuf. Traveling to Drvar meant a five-hour hike by foot or a three-hour train ride. Kulen Vakuf, by contrast, was only twelve kilometers away down a predominately flat dirt road which ran parallel to the Una. As the regional newspaper *Krajina* pointed out, there was no logic in their wish for Martin Brod to be attached to Drvar.\(^{486}\) Members of the League of Communists, however, noted in a meeting conducted behind closed doors that “chauvinism” was the driving force behind the desire of many villagers in Martin Brod to detach their village from Kulen Vakuf.\(^{487}\)

The underlying reason was most likely a sense of discomfort at having to visit the municipality in Kulen Vakuf, a town many Serbs in Martin Brod apparently saw as an “Ustasha place.”\(^{488}\)

Muslims in the Ljutoč valley sometimes responded with anger to the notion prevalent among Serbs in the area that they and their region were “Ustasha.” When possible, they spoke out against what they saw as a vulgar distortion. In the spring of 1958, during the local election for who would represent the region in the parliament for the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, two Serb candidates faced off against one another. One was Vaso Trikić, a former member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other Milan Zorić, a general in the

\(^{486}\) *Krajina*, „Savjetovanje Sreske komisije za komunalno uređenje. Četnaest opština,” 16 June 1955, 1.

\(^{487}\) AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 148, Referat Prve konferencije Saveza komunista Bihać, 9 July 1955, 7; See also in Ibid., kut. 144, Materijali sa opštinske konferencije, 4 August 1955, 5.

\(^{488}\) Derviš Kurtagić briefly mentions the tension over the existence of the municipality of Kulen Vakuf in his memoirs. He indirectly refers to the relief Serbs in Martin Brod felt when their village was finally attached to the municipality of Drvar after the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was abolished around 1960. For the Serbs, he appears to say, “it was easier to breathe.” See Kurtagić, *Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu*, 65.
Yugoslav People’s Army. On 6 March 1958, Trikić came to Kulen Vakuf and gave a pre-election speech in which, apparently, before, during or after, he referred to the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf as Ustashas and called their region Ustasha. Others said that his main offense was mentioning “the brotherly nations of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins,” but leaving out the Muslims. Whatever the case, the speech engendered rage among a number of Muslims who were in attendance. A Muslim from Klisa, who apparently already felt that Trikić held anti-Muslim attitudes, was reported to have come to the speech armed with a knife in order to stab him. The local militia intervened and confiscated the weapon. Other Muslims had less extreme ideas about how to respond to Trikić, but were no less disgusted with his comments. Adem Kulenović, a Muslim from Kulen Vakuf, was overheard later that same day in a tavern saying: “We won’t vote this time for Vaso. We’ll vote for General Zorić because Vaso told us yesterday that we are Ustashas and that Kulen Vakuf is an Ustasha place.” Kulenović was reportedly able to mobilize at least fifty Muslim men to vote for Zorić for this reason.

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489 For further biographical information on Vaso Trikić, see in Ibid., kut. bez broja, Prijedlog drugova za sastav novog SK BiH Bihać, 1956. On the points of differences between the two candidates, see in Ibid., kut. 163, Zapisnik sa sjednice Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista Kulen Vakuf, 17 March 1958, 4.

490 Ibid., kut. 164, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Analiza nekih pojava u vezi sa sprovedenim izborima za Narodne poslanike, 31 March 1958, 5. General Milan Zorić appears to have enjoyed the wide respect of Muslims in the region due to his behavior towards them during the war. Some Muslims from the village of Bjelaj came to a pre-election meeting in Orašac in 1958 and told a story about how General Zorić had come to a house in their village in 1941 with a torn shirt. The man with whom he spoke immediately offered him two new shirts. Zorić told him that he could not accept anything if the man did not first seek to permission of the village elders, and so the man immediately went off to consult with them. Only after they agreed to give Zorić the shirts did he accept them. Because of such behavior, the villagers from Bjelaj told those in Orašac that Zorić is “the most just man in the world.” See Ibid., 6.
On other occasions, Serbs deployed the idea of Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place” as a sort of weapon in fights and disagreement among themselves. In December of 1958, Branko Atlagić verbally assaulted a group of Serbs in the village of Prkosi for not wanting their village to be part of a future municipality of Vrtoče. He tried to persuade them by saying that if they agreed to leave the municipality of Kulen Vakuf and join the proposed municipality of Vrtoče they would have a store in their village. They responded that they already had a store. Altagic then erupted in anger: “Yeah, the store
in Prkosi is Ustasha…” 492 He said this because the store was owned and operated by Muslims in Kulen Vakuf who ran the trading firm “Ostrovica.” Some Serbs appear to have viewed it as an “Ustasha firm” not only because of where it was based, but also due to the fact that it employed only one Serb and at least thirteen Muslims, nearly all of whom were from Kulen Vakuf. 493 For Altagić, the fact that Muslims from Kulen Vakuf owned the store in Prkosi automatically made it “Ustasha.” Continuing to yell at the Serbs in Prkosi, he then added: “We (i.e., the Serbs from Vrtoč) liberated you in Prkosi and Oraško Brdo from the Ustashas whose municipality (Kulen Vakuf) you now love belonging to. The time will come once again when they (the Muslims) will slaughter you, and so let them slaughter you…we won’t defend you from them.” 494 Altagić’s outburst exemplified how pervasive the notion was among many Serbs in the region of Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place,” and its predominately Muslim inhabitants as “Ustashas.” Moreover, by using it as a way to harshly attack fellow Serbs, his comments demonstrated just how derogatory such a characterization was during the postwar years.

The widespread notion of Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place” had grave consequences with regards to the postwar perception of the massacres which the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley endured in September 1941. If they were believed to have been


493 Ibid., kut. 161, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Informacija o oblicima ispoljavanja šovinizma na opštini Kulen Vakuf, 28 December 1958, 1-2; The trading firm „Ostrovica” had opened four stores in the region by 1956. For more basic information on the activities of the firm, see in Ibid., kut. 148, Analiza o kadru u trgovini na području Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista Kulen Vakuf, 1956, 1-2; On the view of some Serbs of the “Ostrovica” firm as biased against them, see in Ibid., kut. 184, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, Bihać, 3 June 1961, 14.

Ustashas, then whatever happened to them during the war could be justified or explained away as a legitimate response to dealing with the enemy. Viewed this way, the massacres did not constitute any kind of war crime because all the victims were seen as Ustashas, and therefore as the enemy. By characterizing Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place,” Serbs in the region helped to ensure that the massacres would be understood by most as a part of the category of losses which “the enemy” suffered, losses which the regime had no interest in even counting.  

Indeed, the category which the Communist regime created after the war for official civilian war victims, “Victims of Fascist Terror” [žrtve fašističkog terora], the designation of which provided the families of such victims with material benefits, was never assigned to the victims of the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf. Yet this was not the case because the authorities considered the Muslim civilian victims to have been Ustashas or even their collaborators. In nearly all classified documents which the Communist regime produced about the mass killings in and around Kulen Vakuf—from as early as a few days after the killings until the mid 1980s—officials acknowledged again and again that the victims were innocent civilians. The central reason behind the refusal to grant the victims the status as “Victims of Fascist Terror” was the problem of identifying the fascists would have been their killers. Since

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495 Instructions for the census of the war dead which was to be carried out in 1950 explicitly stated that those to be counted were fighters killed in the ranks of the Partisans, and all civilians of Yugoslavia who were killed during the war (from 6 April 1941 until 10 May 1945) by the occupier and domestic traitors (e.g., Ustashas, Chetniks, etc.). The Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, who had been murdered by Serbian insurgents who later became Partisans, did not fit into any of these categories and therefore could not be counted among the official war dead. On the 1950 census, see ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Zemaljski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a BiH, Popis ljudskih žrtava fašističkog terora NOR-a u našoj republici, 28 November 1949.

496 On the lack of acknowledgement of the Muslim victims of the September 1941 massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf as “Victims of Fascist Terror,” see ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 5; OO SUBNOR Bihać, Predmet: Podaci o stratištima žrtvama fašističkog terora i žrtava rata na području opštine Bihać, 12 April 1985, 1; Napomene uz Pregled stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora, June 1985, 6; Referat Mirka Vranić, undated document, 1; Osvrt na pregled stratišta i žrtava fašističkog terora i njihove obilježenosti u Bosni i Hercegovini, November 1986, 9.
the vast majority of the perpetrators had become Partisans, this was politically impossible, and so the victims remained officially non-existent.

Nevertheless, the popular stereotype among many Serbs of the region as an “Ustasha place” ultimately placed a veil of silence over its Muslim inhabitants when it came to talking about the massacres. In such a context, speaking about the killings became equivalent to speaking about the losses which “the enemy” suffered, which was a taboo subject. The widespread notion of Kulen Vakuf as an “Ustasha place” added a further layer to the impossibility of publicly speaking about the massacres, and thus contributed in a significant way to creating a public culture of silence about the mass killings.

A fourth element at work in the formation of the silence about the massacres could be found germinating inside the survivors. The traumas which they had experienced and a widespread sense of fear among them that the massacres might be repeated one day contributed to a desire among many survivors to not speak about the events of 6-8 September 1941. For some survivors, the traumas they experienced during the mass killings continuously intruded and interrupted their postwar lives, indicating that, for some, time had in a way stopped at the point when the massacres took place. This condition, known among psychologists as “intrusion,” manifested in a number of survivors through repeated nightmares about the mass killings, which reflected the deep traumas they had endured.497 Bećo Šiljdedić, who insurgents had shot in the head at Dulidba and then dumped into the Dugopolje pit with around seventy of his neighbors, was one such individual. He had managed to crawl out of the pit and survived the mass

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497 On the psychological condition “intrusion,” which is common among survivors of many different types of trauma, see Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 37-39
killings, but the horror of what he experienced on 6 September 1941 never left him. Nearly every night he would have intense nightmares about the massacres, usually waking up several times, sweating profusely and feeling feverish after having dreamed about some aspect of the killings.\textsuperscript{498} Others apparently would have such vivid and disturbing nightmares that the trauma of what they experienced during the massacres would manifest through physical symptoms. Some reported that large clumps of their hair would sometimes inexplicably fall out after they awoke from particularly horrifying nightmares.\textsuperscript{499} In many cases, the deep trauma of the mass killings which the survivors carried, and the extensive physical, psychological, emotional wounds that scarred them, never left even after the passage of decades.\textsuperscript{500} The tremendous difficulty of simply recovering from, and living with, their ongoing traumas greatly impaired the capacity of many survivors to feel comfortable speaking about what they had lived through in September 1941.

More than a few survivors were so traumatized by what they had seen and endured during the massacres that they resolved never to speak about what had happened. For some, there appears to have been a superstitious element behind their decision. They believed that the act of speaking about the massacres would somehow lead to their

\textsuperscript{498} Puškar, \textit{Krajiški Pečat}, 97.

\textsuperscript{499} Interview with Reuf Anadolac on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. Herman Lewis argues that it is usually chronically traumatized people who experience intrusive bodily symptoms. See Herman Lewis, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 86. It appears that at some of the Muslims from the Ljutoč had bodily symptoms, despite the relatively short period that the massacres lasted.

\textsuperscript{500} The enduring nature of the traumas that survivors continue to live with to this day was clearly visible during some of the interviews that were conducted for this study. For example, despite the passage of nearly seventy years since the massacres, one elderly man broke down and cried intensely while recounting what it was like to watch his mother throw his three-month old sister into the Una as the insurgents approached them, intent on murdering his entire family. Interview with Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
repetition in the future. Maintaining total silence, therefore, was an absolute necessity in order to protect their children.\footnote{Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.} For others, their silence about the killings was rooted in a desire to not pass on their traumas to their children, who they felt should not have to live burdened by such terrible stories. They did not want their children to grow up hating others because of the massacres, and they were afraid that stories of the killings would somehow weigh down their sons and daughters, sentencing them to a life of constantly living in the past.\footnote{Interview with anonymous informant on 10 October 2008; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.}

Other survivors were justifiably afraid that if they told their stories publicly they would be in danger of suffering from some kind of repressive measures from the predominantly Serb authorities.\footnote{Interview with Mustafa Dervišević on 11 October 2008 in Klisa.} Some believed that the local police force, which was composed almost exclusively of Serbs, would arrest any Muslim who spoke about the September 1941 massacres.\footnote{Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 5 October 2008 in Klisa.} This specific fear was related to a more general sense among Muslims in the region that they could easily be sent to jail if a single Serb spoke out against them, usually by claiming that they had been Ustashas during the war.\footnote{Interview with Mehmed Strkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.} Such a sensibility was most likely rooted in the case of the handful of Muslims who were supposedly falsely accused immediately after the war of having been Ustashas who murdered Serbs in 1941. Several Muslims apparently served sizable jail sentences after
having been found guilty of killing certain Serbs, even though some of Serbs in question were still alive.\textsuperscript{506}

Other Muslims feared some of their Serb neighbors because of what they sometimes heard them say after hours of drinking in taverns. On occasion, some Serbs would let loose with aggressive words about their desire to take revenge on Muslims one day for the killings which the Ustasas committed against Serbs during the war. Two examples from the wider region can illustrate why Muslims had at least some basis for this fear. Nikola Cvjetičanin, who was born in 1941 in the village of Lohovo (located near Ripač, around forty kilometers north of Kulen Vakuf), was heard in a bar sometime in 1962 saying: “If I stay alive, I will avenge my parents. I’m not rolling up my sleeves for nothing. I pray to God that none of the Turks will say anything to me, because I’ll show them who slaughtered my parents, I’ll fuck their Turkish mothers.”\textsuperscript{507} On other occasions, the unveiling of monuments dedicated to the remembrance of Serbs who the Ustasas had murdered during the war served as the catalyst for calls for revenge against Muslims. Gojko Petrović, who was born in 1926 in the village of Ćojluk (located in the region of Bosanska Krupa, northeast of Kulen Vakuf), attended such an event in 1962. After it ended, he yelled to some Muslims who were standing nearby: “I’ll fuck your Turkish mothers, you are all Ustasas, you’ll remember whose mothers you killed in

\textsuperscript{506} Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać. Mehmed Strkljević claimed that a Serb from the village of Prkosi said that Hasan Bećiragić had been an Ustasha during the war. Apparently not long after, Bećiragić was sent to prison on the basis of the testimony of this man who was believed to have participated in the massacres of the Muslims in September 1941. Interview with Mehmed Strkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

\textsuperscript{507} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 6.
1941.” He then started singing a song that glorified Serbs and denigrated Muslims.\textsuperscript{508} The existence of individuals, while small in number, who would make such threats produced fear among Muslims, and contributed to a sense that it was dangerous to publicly speak about the killings.

The traumas which the survivors experienced in September 1941, and lived with during the postwar years, along with the various fears they had—either real or imagined—contributed to an overarching sense among many that it was impossible speak publicly about the massacres. “None of us dared say anything…” was a response which most survivors and their descendents gave when asked whether or not people spoke publicly about the massacres after the war.\textsuperscript{509} For many, talking publicly about the killings would only conjure up terrible memories, and, moreover, held the potential to bring about more trouble from their Serb neighbors. Neither result was desirable for many of the survivors. The constant nightmares that some survivors experienced indicated that they could not forget what they had endured in September 1941. But actively remembering those days was, for many, the last thing they wanted to do.\textsuperscript{510} The traumas and fears which the survivors struggled with in the postwar years were thus yet another crucial element at work in the formation of a public culture of silence.

A final fifth element at work in the formation of the silence could also be found among the survivors of the massacres, as well as their children. The small, but growing

\textsuperscript{508} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{509} Interview with Mustafa Dervišević and extended family on 11 October 2008 in Klisa; Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Bечно Pehlivanoović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Đula Seferović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.

\textsuperscript{510} This dynamic of not being able to “forget,” but also not wanting to “remember,” appears to be common among other survivors of violence, such as rape victims. See Nancy Venable Raine, \textit{After Silence. Rape and My Journey Back} (New York: Crown Publishers, INC, 1998), 186.
number of Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region who joined the League of Communists in years after the war, the vast majority of whom had lost relatives and neighbors in the mass killings, were generally strongly opposed to publicly speaking about the horrific events of September 1941. Most were intensely focused on rebuilding the Ljutoč valley after the devastation of the war years and felt that “touching things from the past” could contribute nothing to the enormous task of material reconstruction. Muslims in the regional League of Communists in Bihać set the tone for this view, stressing that the main objective was to push for the maximum economic development of the Ljutoč valley, and to leave the question of wartime history for some better time, when passions would not be so high. Some with ties to members of the League of Communists in Bihać remember that the atmosphere of “keeping quiet” about the events of September 1941 in Kulen Vakuf among League members was rooted in a deep fear of what might ensue if a public discussion took place. There appears to have been a real sense of apprehension about what might happen if questions about the massacres started to be discussed in the open, or if some kind of investigation began into the killings. It seems that most Muslim Communists in the Ljutoč valley considered speaking publicly about the massacres to be a potentially dangerous activity, as many of the Serbs responsible for the killings still lived in the villages which surrounded the valley. Talking about the massacres, they believed, or visiting the sites where the killings took place, like Golubnjača, which was located near Martin Brod, a completely Serbian village, would

511 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

512 Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać.

513 Interview with Sadeta Ibrahimpašić on 29 September 2008 in Bihać.
have been highly provocative acts. There was fear that such activities would have a destabilizing effect on national relations in the region. For these Muslims, emphasizing the “Brotherhood and Unity” of Serbs and Muslims—not dwelling on massacres which Serbs had committed against Muslims—was what needed to be done. The vigor with which they promoted this agenda can be seen in the comments of a daughter of a survivor of the September massacres who described the political atmosphere in the initial years after the war in this way: “It was Brotherhood and Unity and ‘goodbye,’ that’s it. Everyone is equal, everyone is the same and that’s the end of it. What happened is what happened and that’s it.” The force with which Muslim members of the League of Communists stressed these sentiments after the war was yet another element which functioned in the creation of a public culture of silence.

The prohibition of exhuming and burying the bodies of the victims; the absence of any trials of those responsible for the killings and the resulting regular encounters between survivors and perpetrators; the pervasive sense among Serbs that Kulen Vakuf, and the rest of the Ljutoč valley was an “Ustasha place;” the deep traumas and fears which the survivors lived with; and the zeal with which Muslim Communists promoted the ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity”—all of these elements were crucial to the formation of a public culture of silence about the September 1941 massacres. But behind the relative safety of closed doors, in the makeshift houses that the returning refugees had cobbled together in the initial years after the war, a number of survivors nevertheless began to act against this dominant current by telling stories about the massacres to their

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514 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

515 Interview with Đula Sefervović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.
children, relatives, and neighbors. Such stories ensured that the events of 6-8 September 1941 would live on outside of the public sphere, although the specific dynamics of who told such stories, as well as their reasons for doing so, varied from family to family.

For some survivors, it appears that speaking about the massacres soon became an integral part of their private lives with family and neighbors. Mujo Dervišević, who narrowly escaped certain death at Golubnjača, and his wife, who along with her children were saved by a Serb insurgent, spoke regularly about their experiences with their children and neighbors in Klisa. One of their daughters named Đula would listen as her father would describe what it was like to watch the Serbs murder the Muslim men and boys at Golubnjača. She was transfixed by the horror that he had experienced while watching the insurgents cut off the hands and ears of some of their prisoners before killing them. On other occasions, her father would return home and share his revulsion and disgust with his family about having run into Mile Pilipović, the insurgent who stood ready to murder him at Golubnjača before he escaped. Pilipović, who eventually became an officer in the Yugoslav People’s Army, was born not far from Kilsa in the village of Kalati, and it seems that the two would sometimes encounter one another when Pilipović was in the region. Dervišević quickly became known among the Muslims in the Ljutoč valley as the sole survivor of the massacre at Golubnjača, and more than a few of his neighbors sought him out to hear his stories. Some did so repeatedly, listening to his story as many as ten times.516

Dervišević’s daughter Đula would also listen to her mother who would regularly speak about her experiences during the massacres. She would usually return at some

516 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.
point during her stories to her deep affection for the insurgent who had saved her and her children from other insurgents who wished to murder them. And sometimes Đula’s grandmother would speak of her own ordeals during the massacres, especially of having fled from the insurgents to cornfields in Kulen Vakuf, where she hid for nearly seven days. As Đula recounted her memories of family story telling, waving her hands, her voice booming, it was clear that she had heard such stories many times, and that talking about the massacres was not a taboo subject in her house.517

In households where such story telling was a frequent occurrence, children came to know what had happened during the massacres in bits and pieces, which they eventually stitched together into a more coherent story as they grew up. Mehmed Strkljević’s mother was still pregnant with him when she jumped into the Una on 6 September 1941 to save herself from the insurgents and Serb peasants who wanted to kill her. As he grew up, he gradually pieced together what she had endured through the stories she frequently told. Everyday experiences in Kulen Vakuf most likely provided survivors like Strkljević’s mother with regular opportunities to tell their stories to their children. Walking past the Una surely reminded her of the day she threw her children and herself into the rushing water. Washing her dimije, the traditional baggy pants worn by Muslim women in Bosnia, may have brought back memories of how they filled with air after she plunged into the water, keeping her afloat long enough to not drown like so many others. These sorts of everyday experiences, along with many others, were the likely catalyst for the frequent telling of stories to her children. Their regularity was such that Mehmed Strkljević sometimes felt while growing up that he was already alive when

517 Interviews with Đula Seferović on 3 and 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.
the massacres had taken place, even though his mother gave birth to him several months later.518

At first, some children found the stories to be so horrific and incomprehensible in light of the peaceful postwar world in which they lived that they simply could not believe that such atrocities had occurred. Eventually, however, after hearing such stories told repeatedly not only by their parents, but also by other relatives, as well as neighbors, the children came to realize that the massacres had taken place.519 More than a few children had lost either one or both of their parents during the mass killings, and they usually found out about the massacres through the aunts and other usually female relatives who were raising them.520 In general, it seems that Muslim women were more likely to tell stories about the massacres than Muslim men.521 Part of this may have had to do with the fact that during the initial years after the war there were simply more women in the Ljutoč valley than men, which was a result of the insurgents having specifically targeted the vast majority of Muslim men for murder. Initially, the surviving Muslim women of the Ljutoč valley returned in the greatest numbers after the war. This may be a main reason why more children of survivors remember hearing stories about the massacres being told by their mothers or other female relatives than by their fathers and male relatives.

The women may have felt a strong need to recount their stories as a means of recovering from the traumas they lived through during the massacres. Psychologists note

518 Interview with Mehmed Strkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
519 Interview with Reuf Anadolac on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
520 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Mujo Demirović on 30 September 2008 in Bihać; Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 32.
521 Interview with Bećo Pehlivanović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać.
that survivors of trauma often experience traumatic memories as a series of snapshots or a silent movie. Such memories usually lack emotions, feelings and interpretations of events. The act of telling the story of a traumatic experience infuses such missing elements. To the silent film which the survivor exists with, the act of telling the story to others, especially those who have experienced similar traumas, provide the missing words and music. These elements are crucial first steps towards any kind of recovery. The Muslim women of the Ljutoč valley may have intuitively begun to tell their stories as a way of recuperating after suffering such enormous losses, acts which were a crucial means for re-establishing themselves individually and as a community.522

As for the Muslim men, one possible reason why some of them had less of a desire to speak about the massacres, even in the relative safety of the private sphere, may have had to do with their fear of political repercussions. In general, it seems that UDBA was more concerned about what it viewed as any subversive activities which men might have participated in, and, for the most part, paid less attention to the activities of women.523 As a result, Muslim men in the valley who harbored ideas about one day joining the League of Communists, or who were already members, were often the most vocal in discouraging their more elderly relatives from sharing their stories about the massacres. Some simply did not want their children burdened with such horrific

522 On the act of recounting stories of traumatic experiences as a way to recovery and reintegration within a wider community, see Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175-213. See also, Fivush, “Speaking Silence,” 9, who argues that “the individual must have a community of listeners able and willing to hear and validate their experiences in order to create more coherent narratives, and when they do, the evolving narrative coherence is linked to higher levels of both physical and psychological well-being.”

523 For certain cases in which UDBA was specifically interested in policing behavior among the female Muslim population, as was the case in 1950 during the campaign to compel Muslim women to remove the veil, hijab and burkha, its officers paid close attention to the activities of women as well as men. Kurtagić, *Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu*, 59. On the general tendency of UDBA to pay closer attention to the activities of the Muslim men in the valley, see in Ibid., 46.
memories; but others did not want their politically-unaware children spreading rumors that their families were telling stories about the killings out of fear of how such information might affect their status as present or future members of the League of Communists.524

It appears that some survivors who lost one or both of their parents during the massacres were among those who were most resistant to speaking about what happened. One child of a survivor remembered asking his father what happened to his grandfather during the war. He had been among the Muslim men and boys who the insurgents had murdered at Golubnjača. His father was disturbed by his son’s questions and could do nothing else except shake his head and say: “We will not talk about that, it shouldn’t be mentioned. What happened is what happened, that’s it.”525 Other children, who slowly came to realize their families had lost a sizable numbers of members in the September massacres, did not even have such brief conversations with their parents. Their mothers and fathers simply never spoke a single word about what they had lived through during the war, and their children could not bring themselves to ask, or it never occurred to them to inquire.526 In some cases, stories about the killings did eventually emerge in these families, but often decades after the end of the war, and sometimes not until the late 1980s and early 1990s.527

524 Interview with Bećo Pehlivanović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać.

525 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.

526 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 8 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. The psychologist Dan Bar-On has called this type of parent-child relationship a “double wall phenomenon.” Parents create a wall around their feelings about the atrocities they have endured or witnessed, and their children react by building their own protective wall. See Bar-On, The Legacy of Silence, 328.

527 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.

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In cases where parents refused or were extremely reluctant to speak, most children eventually found out about the mass killings from their grandparents and other family friends who spoke more freely about wartime events. Adil Kulenović, who was born in 1948, remembered listening on numerous occasions as a young boy to his parents’ friends as they spoke about how Serbs threw Muslim women and children from a bridge into the Una. Certain details of these stories etched into his young mind, like how a Muslim woman managed to hide one of her children while the Serbs hurled the other into the water, and how Serb women participated in the throwing of Muslim women and children into the river. Hearing such stories occurred frequently enough that Kulenović described listening to them as “a part of my childhood.”

Only on rare occasions did forms of private story telling about the massacres unexpectedly spill out into the public sphere, and this usually occurred in an indirect way and only for very brief periods. Derviš Kurtagić, who had recently graduated from the University of Zagreb and returned to Kulen Vakuf to work as the veterinarian for the region, recounts a story in his memoirs in which such an instance occurred. On a summer night during the late 1950s, he was standing next to the Una listening to the rushing water. At one moment a harmonica began playing. The music was coming from the direction of the pijaca, or outdoor market, the place which had regularly filled with Muslims and Serbs every Thursday since the early days after the war. He started walking towards market, listening as the music grew louder and louder. There he saw a man named Esad playing a harmonica, and another called Meho Topčić was standing next

528 Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo.
to him. Gathered around them were several others. They were singing songs. People in nearby houses were opening their windows so as to better hear the music, and young people were slowly trickling out of the doorways of their homes and joining the men who were singing. At one point Esad switched to a new song and began singing alone. It was a song about a Muslim woman whose last name was Ćehić. She had lost five sons to “the enemy’s hand” [dušmanska ruka] With so many in Kulen Vakuf having suffered similar losses in the September 1941 massacres, the song obviously had a special resonance. As the crowd grew larger, Esad sang verse after verse:

Na mezaru majka
plače i nišane ljubi
suze roni, bijele prste lomi
suze roni, bijele prste lomi

Ja imadoh pet sinova
k’o pet gorskih vila
a sada ih kabur zemlja skriva
a sada ih kabur zemlja skriva

Da mi Allah djecu uze
ni po moje muke
več padoše od dušmanske ruke
več padoše od dušmanske ruke

Zadnje riječi majka zbori
i na mezar pada
jer je srce prepuče od jada
jer je srce prepuče od jada

A mother in the graveyard
weeps and kisses the gravestones
she sheds tears, clenching white fingers
she sheds tears, clenching white fingers

I had five sons
like five mountain fairies
and now the grave hides them
and now the grave hides them

\[529\] This man may have been Esad Kurtagić, who was known in Kulen Vakuf as a harmonica player who assisted with the running of cultural and artistic programs for the youth of the region. See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. ?, Komisija za žalbe, molbe i predstavke, 1 March 1962, 3.
If Allah took my children
it would not be half as much torment
but they fell from the enemy’s hand
but they fell from the enemy’s hand

The mother speaks the final words
and falls in the graveyard
because her heart broke from sorrow
because her heart broke from sorrow

Of those who gathered around listening to the song, Kurtagić remembered that many were crying by the time Esad finished singing. By that point, several members of the League of Communists had arrived and had joined the group listening to the music.

In this instance, it appears that a rare kind of indirect public story telling about the massacres unfolded unexpectedly out in the open. While the song was not specifically about a mother who had lost five sons in the September massacres, the words about immense loss seems to have triggered feelings and memories which reminded those listening of the pain they had endured in September 1941. Nearly every Muslim in the Ljutoč valley had a real-life story of pain and loss which was similar to that told in the song about the mother in the graveyard. The singing of the song provided those listening with an uncommon opportunity to publicly remember relatives and neighbors murdered in 1941. The public singing of the song brought memories of the killings out from behind closed doors. People opened their windows to let the song filter into their rooms, and others came out of their houses to listen better, with many weeping in response to the traumatic events which the singing conjured up. After a few moments it all stopped, and the overarching public culture of silence returned just as fast as the song had temporarily cracked open a space in it.

530 Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 63-64.
531 Ibid.
This type of experience suggests a strong need that some survivors had to engage in public acts of mourning for the enormous losses they had suffered. When the rare opportunity presented itself, it appears that more than a few were ready to openly grieve for those who had been murdered. By the late 1950s, the regular private story telling that many survivors had participated in since the end of the war appears to have compelled a small number of them, as well as a few of their children, to begin engaging in covert acts of mourning and remembrance outside of their homes. Mujo Dervišević, the only man who escaped the massacre at Golubnjača, and who had no qualms about telling his story to his family and neighbors, was among the first to attempt to take a more proactive approach to the remembrance of the victims. Sometime in the mid- to late-1950s he decided to lead several older men from the Ljutoč valley to Golubnjača. They had been fathers of young Muslim men who the Serbs had murdered at the pit. After listening to Dervišević’s stories, they wanted to see the place where their children had been killed, and look into the pit where they bodies had been thrown. They set off one day for Martin Brod, with Dervišević leading the way. But local Serbs stopped them at some point along the way, most likely when they were very close to the pit, as by that point the Serbs would have been certain where the Muslims were headed. They threatened Dervišević and the men he was with, warning them to stay away from Golubnjača, and saying that they should never return.532

Not long after, perhaps in 1956 or 1957, the veterinarian Derviš Kurtagić had a similar idea, but was more successful. Since the end of the war he had listened to a constant flow of stories about the massacres from his aunt Fata, as well as from the many

532 Interview with Dula Seferović on 3 October 2008 in Ostrovica.
other Muslims and Serbs he visited while working as a veterinarian in the region. He apparently decided to visit Golubnjača in order to pray for the over 400 Muslim men and boys who the insurgents had murdered there on 8 September 1941. It appears that going to the pit soon became his personal ritual of remembrance for the victims. He would drive his jeep every 7 September to Martin Brod, and then a few more kilometers up a dirt road into the hills, stopping at a spot just across the border into Croatia. After walking for a minute or two through the dense forest, he came to the place where the pit was located. There was large rock next to its entrance. He would raise his hands up towards his chest with his palms turned towards his face, and pray for the dead, quickly repeating the words in Arabic which he had learned as a boy. He would finish by slowly bringing his palms to his face and then running them over his eyes and cheeks. Usually Kurtagić would then stay a bit, smoking. As he took drags on his cigarettes, he would exhale the smoke and stare at the pit, thinking about the men and boys who had been murdered there. The insurgents had killed many members of his extended family during the September massacres, and he often remembered them while he sat next to the deep pit in which some of their bodies had most likely been thrown.533

Others who took the risk of visiting Golubnjača did so less out a desire to pray and mourn for the dead, and more out a deep sense of disbelief as to how so many of their relatives and neighbors could have been slaughtered there without resisting in some way. Ahmet Kadić, who was born in 1948, grew up hearing stories about the large number of members of his extended family who the insurgents had murdered in the September massacres. His grandfather had been among the Muslim men and boys who had been

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533 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf; Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakuf, 32.
slaughtered at Golubnjača. As a young man his work in trade required him to travel frequently to Croatia, especially to the town of Knin. On his way he would pass near the pit where his grandfather had been murdered and decided to make a habit of stopping there nearly every time he traveled by. He eventually married a Serb woman from Knin named Nataša, and he often took her to the opening of the pit when they would travel back and forth between her hometown and Kulen Vakuf. Kadić would usually search for a small stone as he approached the pit. His ritual was to stand at the edge of the dark hole and then drop the stone in, waiting silently for a few seconds to hear the sound of it hitting the bottom. He would always remark to his wife: “Look how deep it is!” After a moment of silence he would then usually express his disbelief as to how so many men and boys could have allowed themselves to be tied together, and then taken to Golubnjača and murdered. “Why didn’t they defend themselves!?” he would often repeatedly ask out loud.\footnote{Interview with Nataša Kadić on 22 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. Ahmet Kadić was taken prisoner on 12 June 1992 by Bosnian Serb forces after they overran the Kulen Vakuf region. Despite promises that he would be released in a prisoner exchange, he was executed after months of torture in a Serbian-run concentration camp in Ripač. The remains of his body were recovered and identified several years after the end of the war in 1995.}
18. The Una River in the village of Martin Brod. The Golubnjača pit is located a few kilometers away in the hills in the upper right of the photograph. That site is now in a de-militarized zone on the border between the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The area is apparently closed to all non-military personnel. Photograph taken by the author on 10 October 2008.

Individuals such as Ahmet Kadić and Derviš Kurtagić listened to the stories that survivors like Mujo Dervišević told behind closed doors, but they had no outlet through any kind of state-organized commemoration to visit the places where the killings occurred. Engaging in public acts of remembrance for the victims of the September massacres was implicitly forbidden because such victims had never officially existed. The Muslim victims could not be designated as “Victims of Fascist Terror” because this would have meant that “fascist” perpetrators would need to be identified. This was impossible given that large numbers of those responsible for the killings had become Partisans during the course of the war. And yet, in spite of the political context which did
not acknowledge the victims, private story telling eventually began to hammer small cracks into the public culture of silence about the killings. The stories and memories of the massacres lived on behind closed doors as survivors communicated them amongst themselves and to their children, relatives, and neighbors. This ultimately compelled a handful of survivors and others to venture out from behind those doors and begin participating in scattered acts of mourning and remembrance.

The local Communist authorities created the silence about Muslim victims in myriad ways, from prohibiting the exhumation and burial of their remains, to avoiding an investigation by the war crimes commission into the massacres. These policies contributed to further cementing the wartime notion that the Kulen Vakuf region was an “Ustasha place,” and that those who the insurgents had murdered were Ustashas or their relatives. All of these elements formed the basis of the public culture of silence about these Muslim victims which the Communist regime was responsible for creating. As for the Muslim survivors, not being allowed to bury their relatives and neighbors, and being forced to encounter the perpetrators of the massacres on a regular basis, communicated to them that public silence was the only acceptable form of communication about the killings. Further contributing to the silence were their deep traumas and fears which were rooted in their experiences of surviving the massacres. This compelled many to believe that speaking publicly about the mass killings would only conjure up horrible memories and, moreover, held the potential to cause problems with the authorities and their Serb neighbors. Other survivors, who eventually joined the Communist Party, felt that discussing the massacres would contribute nothing positive to the cultivation of
“Brotherhood and Unity” and economic development. For them, promoting positive national relations in the present and rebuilding their war-torn region was what needed to be done—not “touching things from the past.” These were the key ways in which the survivors of massacres contributed to the formation of the public culture of silence.

These complex dynamics make clear that the silence which crystallized in the years after the war was not merely the result of the Communist regime “silencing” the survivors of the massacres. Rather, it was also the product of most of the survivors choosing to “be silent” for various reasons. In this way, they too were complicit in the creation and enforcement of the silence about the September massacres. Through private story telling, a small number of individuals worked against these dominant tendencies, but their efforts were insufficient to bring about any kind of significant change to the dominant public culture of silence. This atmosphere, in which nearly everyone knew, but did not publicly speak about the massacres of the Muslims, was all the more striking given the radically different treatment available for Serb civilian war victims. It is to that subject which the next chapter turns.
Chapter Five

Serb Reactions

The Muslims of the Ljutoč valley both contributed to, and had no choice but to accept, the overarching public culture of silence about the September 1941 massacres which crystallized in the years after the war. The private telling of stories by some survivors, and the visiting of the sites of mass killing by a handful of them and others, were their chief mechanisms for grieving and remembrance. The Serbs in the region, by contrast, had a vastly differently set of options available to them when it came to mourning and remembering their victims, and achieving some sense of justice about the losses they had suffered during the war. If the Muslims were silenced and remained silent about their wartime losses, their Serb neighbors were able to partake in a multi-faceted culture of remembrance.

Unlike the Muslim civilian war dead from the Ljutoč valley, Serbs who had been killed fighting as Partisans, and Serb civilians who the Ustashas had murdered, fit into the Communist regime’s two official postwar categories of war dead: “Fallen Fighters” [pali borci] and “Victims of Fascist Terror” [žrtve fašističkog terora]. The former referred to those who were killed while fighting as Partisans during the years 1941-1945, while the latter were civilians who were killed either at the hands of the occupying Axis armies or the various factions that the Communist authorities grouped under the rubric “domestic traitors” [domaći izdajnici] (e.g., the Chetniks, Ustashas, etc.).\footnote{ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Uputstvo za prikupljanje podataka o poginulim i preživjelim borcima Narodnooslobodilačkog rata od 1941-1945 i poginulim žrtvama fašističkog terora, undated document, 9-16.} As long as Serbs killed during the war had not fought to the end as Chetniks, they were generally counted as official victims in one of the two categories in the postwar census of the war dead which
the government eventually conducted in 1950. Once a victim was officially recorded as either a “Fallen Fighter” or “Victim of Fascist Terror,” the family received a certificate that entitled its members to material benefits as the surviving relatives of an official war victim. While the groupings of “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror” did not explicitly acknowledge the nationality of the Serb war victims, such categories nonetheless ensured that the victims could be publicly recognized and remembered, albeit in non-national terms. The first concrete step in counting and acknowledging Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region as official war victims occurred very early after the war when the District Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bihać carried out its investigations of war crimes (1944-1947). Much of the documentation which the commission produced included precise information on the numbers of Serb victims, often listing each by name, village of origin, date of birth, and age at time of death. All of this documentation contributed most of the necessary

536 On the postwar census of the war dead, see in Ibid., Zemaljski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a BiH, Popis ljudskih žrtava fašističkog terora NOR-a u našoj republici, 28 November 1949, 1-2.


538 See, for example, AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946; dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmut, 26 August 1946; dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužištvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujaga, 15 October 1946; Ibid., kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtoče, 31 July 1946; Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajnovci, 7 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946; ABiH, Fond ZKUZBiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946; kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; kut. 88, Zapisnik sastavljen kod NOO-a Martin Brod, October, 1944; kut. 91, Zapisnik sastavljen kod Sreskog sudu u Drvaru, 12 December 1945; Zapisnik sastavljen u kancelariji okružnog organa ZFM-KOM-e za okrug Drvar, Saslušanje Vladimira Tankosića po masovnim ubistvu u selu Boričevac dana 24.VII.1941, 28 March 1945.
evidence for certifying Serb civilian war victims in the region as official “Victims of Fascist Terror.”

This status ensured that there would be no explicit governmental opposition to collecting the remains of Serb war victims for burial. In many instances, there was actually strong official support for gathering the bones of such victims from the places of mass killing for reburial, and for marking the sites with graves and monuments.539 During the late 1940s in the Bihać region, the local authorities sketched out plans for exhuming many of the remains of the large number of Serbs who the Ustasha had murdered at Garavice. The site, located a few kilometers outside of the city of Bihać, was where the Ustasha had initially begun the mass killing of Serbs in the region on 17 June 1941. It was usually ex-Partisans who led the attempts to uncover the remains of the victims. Newspaper articles publicized the types of personal articles, such as shoes and cups, which the men digging were finding among the remains in the mass graves. And there was commentary about the difficulty they faced in finding a suitable location for the reburial where the remains would be safe from damage that the yearly spring flooding of the Una would be sure to cause. While these discussions and debates unfolded during the early and mid 1950s, Partisan veterans unearthed the remains of other Serb victims in the region at sites where smaller mass killings had occurred.540

The main socio-political organization which coordinated the exhumations was the Association of Fighters of the People’s Liberation War for Bosnia and Herzegovina, usually known by its acronym SBNOR BiH [Savez boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata

539 Ibid., Fond SUBNOR, Predmet: Obilježavanje i čuvanje grobova, 4 August 1949, 1.

Bosne i Hercegovine]. This was the organization of Partisan veterans which the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia formed in late 1947 and early 1948.\textsuperscript{541}

No long after, an organ was created for the Bihać region, and a local branch soon formed in the Kulen Vakuf region.\textsuperscript{542} In the Serbian villages located in the hills surrounding the Ljutoč valley, local villagers, a number of whom were ex-Partisans and members of SBNOR, faced little to no opposition from the authorities in exhuming and reburying the remains of their relatives and neighbors who the Ustashas had murdered. This did not mean, however, that large numbers of reburials took place. In a number of cases, the government had compensated the relatives of the victims, many of whom had fought as Partisans, by resettling them after the war as colonists in the region of Vojvodina in northern Serbia. There they received some of Yugoslavia’s best agricultural lands which were suddenly available after the Communist regime expelled the German minority that had previously lived there. Having left their home villages, the Serbs who resettled in Vojvodina were unable to participate in searching for the remains of their relatives. As a result, a sizable number of the victims of the Ustashas in the Kulen Vakuf region were never exhumed and reburied in cemeteries.\textsuperscript{543}

But many other Serbs in the region did eventually search for, and find, the remains of their relatives and neighbors. They generally reburied them in Orthodox

\textsuperscript{541} On the founding congress for the federal organ of SBNOR, see see AJ, Fond 297, Savezni odbor (SO) Saveza uduženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslovije (SUBNOR), inv. I, f-1, Osnivački kongres Saveza boraca Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata, 29-30 October 1947.

\textsuperscript{542} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Stanje i rad u organizaciji Saveza boraca, 1951, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{543} Interview with Svetozar Tankosić on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod. It appears that few, if any, exhumations were ever carried out of the remains of Serbs who the Ustashas had thrown into pits, such as Boričevac. Apparently, the work was considered to be too dangerous. In some cases the local authorities decided to seal such pits with concrete.
cemeteries where they would be able to perform the traditional death rituals central to the practice of Orthodoxy in the Serbian villages of the Kulen Vakuf region. Serbs from villages such as Prkosi, Vrtoče, Veliko Očijevo, Mali and Veliki Stjenjani, Rajinovci, and many others, searched for the sites where they knew, or had heard, that the Ustashas had committed mass killings. They dug into the mass graves, retrieved as many of the bones of their relatives and neighbors as possible, and then reburied them in their village cemeteries, usually marking each with a gravestone. This was a crucial first step in assisting the souls of the dead to peacefully enter and exist in “the other world,” a central duty of the living to the deceased according to the tenets Serbian Orthodoxy. The gravestones were to serve as the new homes for the souls of the dead, and would be the central locations for the rituals of mourning which the living would engage in.

Most of these exhumations and reburials of Serb war victims in the Kulen Vakuf region appear to have been carried out during the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s. During the same time, the members of District Commission, in cooperation with the staff of the local courts, were engaged with prosecuting a number of Ustashas from the wider Bihać region. Ultimately, the local Communist authorities found nearly all the accused guilty for having murdered many of those Serbs whose remains were being

544 On “the cult of the dead” [kult mrtvih] among Serbs and the specific set of death rituals central to the practice of Serbian Orthodoxy, particularly in the village setting, see Slobodan Zečević, Kult mrtvih kod Srba (Beograd: Etnografski muzej, 1982); Bojan Jovanović, Srpska knjiga mrtvih. Tanatologike I (Novi Sad: Promet, 2002); Dušan Bandić, Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko. Ogledi o narodnoj religiji (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1990), idem., Tabu u tradicionalnoj kulturi Srba (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1980).

545 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Izvještaj o radu i problemima organizacije Saveza boraca NOR-a srez Bihać, 26 February 1960, 10; Zapisnik o izvršenom pregledu grobova i groblja kao i spomen ploča na području opštine Bosanski Petrovac, 8 December 1960, 1-3; Opština Bihać, Podaci o grobovima i grobljima koji nisu obliježeni, undated (most likely 1960), 2.

546 For a detailed elaboration of such beliefs, see the literature cited in footnote 455.
exhumed. The trials, which were mostly conducted in Bihać, resulted in at least seven Muslims from the Ljutoč valley being found guilty for having committed war crimes against Serbs. In every instance the court asked for the maximum possible prison sentence for the Ustashas. 547 Most of the trials in the Bihać region took place during the first two years after the war, but some continued into the mid to late 1950s. The local press usually devoted extensive attention to the proceedings, often citing in graphic detail the testimony of Serbs who had witnessed and survived mass killings. Some survivors who did not testify were able to attend these trials and had a front-row seat to watching the murderers of their neighbors and relatives be sentenced for their crimes during the war. 548 It appears that the trials were not exhaustive; more than a few Ustashas who were believed to have committed war crimes were never put on trial. For example, in the municipality of Bosanski Petrovac, to which Kulen Vakuf and the rest of the Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley belonged during the first several years after the war, 361 men were said to have been Ustashas, but less than forty were tried and sentenced as war criminals. 549 In this case, and in many others in most other regions of Bosnia and

547 On the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley who were found guilty of having committed war crimes as Ustashas, see AJ, Fond 110 DKUZ, kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pobjedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946; dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmut, 26 August 1946; dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahim, 30 May 1946; dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužioštvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujaga, 15 October 1946.


Herzegovina, it is not clear why so few of the accused were ever punished. Nevertheless, the trials of Ustashas in the Bihać region produced two important results for the Serbs who had survived mass killings: First, the trials brought into public light the extreme brutality which the Serbs in the region endured at the hands of the Ustashas; second, the trials provided the surviving Serbs with some sense of justice once the accused Ustashas were found guilty and sent to prison.

The postwar trials which the Communist regime conducted of suspected Ustasha war criminals; the counting of Serb war victims as “Victims of Fascist Terror,” which erased their nationality, but nonetheless publicly recognized them as official war victims; and the resulting permission for the exhumation and reburial of their remains—these three factors were crucial ways in which the Communist regime publicly acknowledged what the Serbs had suffered during the war. The acknowledgment did play down the nationality of the victims as the basis for the mass killings; but it did not shy away from recognizing the enormous losses the Ustashas had inflicted during the war, and the trials held a number of them accountable for their war crimes. Each element provided Serbs with official recognition of their wartime suffering and some sense of justice that at least some of the perpetrators were being punished. The Muslims of the Ljutoč valley, by contrast, who had also endured terrible suffering, faced a radically different situation. There were never any trials of the Serbs who had murdered their relatives and neighbors. The Communist regime never acknowledged any of the Muslims victims of the

550 According to a letter issued by the Land Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators for Bosnia and Herzegovina, it appears that 1,277 Ustashas were confirmed as war criminals in the republic. Several hundred others had also been confirmed, most as Chetniks. However, 33,803 were suspected of having committed war crimes, but were still at large for undisclosed reasons. On these figures, see Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 49, Izvještaj Predsjedništva vlade Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomogača, 29 March 1947, 1.
September 1941 massacres as “Victims of Fascist Terror.” And the local authorities prohibited the exhumation and burial of the dead. The differences between the ways in which the Communist regime responded to the wartime suffering of Serbian and Muslim victims and their relatives could not have been more vast.

When it came to mourning and remembering the victims of mass killing, the difference in the postwar experiences of Serbs and Muslims continued to be striking. In the Serbian villages of the Kulen Vakuf region, it appears that Serbs focused on their own losses during the war, and viewed themselves as those who had suffered the most. In addition to having the opportunity to exhume and rebury the remains of their relatives and neighbors who the Ustashas had murdered, Serbs were free to speak publicly about the mass killings. Some chose not to, usually because the act of recalling the memories of their lost relatives was too painful, or because they felt that telling stories about what happened to their relatives and neighbors had no use. One Serb who began asking his mother during the early 1960s about his father who the Ustashas murdered received this response: “Don’t ask that, my son, don’t ask…it’s not worth it. You can’t bring your father back.” But other survivors who wished to talk about their experiences appear to have faced no resistance from the authorities in doing so. Vladimir Tankosić, the Serb from the village of Veliko Očijevo who had survived at the bottom of the Boričevac pit for nine days and nights after the Ustasha Miroslav Matijević shot him in the head, spoke freely after the war about his experiences. His story became common knowledge among

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551 Interview with Dimitar Reljić on 10 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
552 Interview with Branko Dobrac on 1 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
553 Interview with Jovica Dilas on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
the Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region and was eventually recorded in a collection of testimonies about the war that SBNOR published in the mid 1970s. The testimonies of others who survived mass killings in the region were also published, especially during the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s. The freedom available to Serb survivors of mass killings in telling their stories led to the creation of several songs about the war dead, which some Serbs would sing when gathered together or when working in the fields, without fear of political repercussions. The following song about nine Serb girls whom the Ustashas had murdered during the summer of 1941 was emblematic:

To je bilo devetoga juna,
Kad poginu devet lijepih cura,
Devet cura, devet sokolova,
Od ustaškog praha i olova.
Jadne majke po šumama lete,
Svaka pita: ‘Gdje je moje dijete?’
‘Kažite nam naše ćerke mile,
jesu li vas ustaše mučile?
Jesu li vas ustaše mučile,
Jesu li vas ustaše ubile?’
Šuma, gora sva priroda nijema,
A od mrtvih odgovora nema.

It was the ninth of June,
When nine beautiful girls were killed,
Nine girls, nine heroes,
who the Ustashas raked over the coals.
Miserable mothers rush through the forests,
each asks: ‘Where is my child?’
‘Tell us, our dear daughters,
did the Ustashas torture you?
Did the Ustashas torture you,
Or did they kill you with rifles?
The forest, all the nature in the woods is silent,
and from the dead there is no answer.”


555 See, for example, the testimony of Dara Škorić in Bogdan Čučak, Nebljusi u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji, 1941.-1945. (Beograd: Savez boraca NOR-a Nebljusci i Skupština opštine Donji Lapac, 1981), 36-39. Like Vladimir Tanskosić, she survived the mass killings at the Boričevac pit.
Besides singing songs and recounting stories about their war victims, Serbs were able to build monuments for their war victims. SBNOR, the political organization responsible for directing monument building throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, placed its initial focus during the late 1940s and throughout much of the 1950s on reburying the remains of Partisans and marking their graves with gravestones and monuments.\footnote{ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Zemaljski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a, Predmet: Uređivanje i građivanje grobova, 26 February 1949, 1. The initial priority given to burying the remains of "Fallen Fighters" can be seen in the following statistics: by 1959, forty-four cemeteries for Partisans had been built and the remains of 6,167 had been buried in them; only seventeen cemeteries for "Victims of Fascist Terror" had been built by time, with the remains of just 637 buried in them. On these numbers, see in Ibid., Izvještaj SBNOR-a BiH od III Kongresa Saveza boraca NOR-a Jugoslavije do kraja 1959 godine, Spomenici NOB-e u BiH, 1959, 80/s-a.} Only in a handful of cases during this period did the organization devote its resources to reburying the remains of "Victims of Fascist Terror," and building monuments in remembrance of them. In the wider Bihać region, only two monuments appear to have been built in the first several years after the war for "Victims of Fascist Terror," one at Vrsta for about 800 victims, and a second at Garavice for what were believed to be 12,000 victims. All were of Serbian nationality.\footnote{Ibid., Sreski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a Bihać, Podaci za spomenike i spomen ploče na terenu ovog sreza, 24 August 1950, 1.} During the mid-1950s, however, the organization slowly began to devote greater attention to dealing with the remains of the large numbers of "Victims of Fascism," the vast majority of which were Serbs. In the Bihać region, the shift appears to have been partially driven by the increasing frequency of criticism about the neglect of the remains of the large number of Serbs who the Ustashas had murdered at Garavice.\footnote{Kecman-Hodak, “Sjećanje na Bušević, Kestenovac, Bosanske Štrpce i Kalate,” 151.}
This general trajectory of monument building was similar in the Kulen Vakuf region. Initially, the mostly Serb veterans of SBNOR focused their attention on building monuments for “Fallen Fighters” from the region, several of whom had been designated as “People’s Heroes.” This was the case in 1956 when a large monument was built for the well-known Partisans Ranko Šipka and Marko Oresković in the neighboring Serbian villages of Veliko and Malo Očijevo. \[560\] Several more monuments for “Fallen Fighters” were built during the late 1950s. It was around this time that local Serbs started to focus more attention on building plaques and monuments for their civilian victims, that is, for “Victims of Fascist Terror.” \[561\] During the first half of the 1960s, such monuments began to appear with increasing frequency in the region, such as the plaque that was raised in Martin Brod in 1965 which was dedicated not only to the Partisans from the village who were killed during the war, but also to one hundred “Victims of Fascist Terror.” \[562\] A monument was also eventually built near the Boričevac pit in memory of the hundreds of Serb men, women, and children who the Ustashas had murdered there. \[563\] In some cases, the commanders of the insurgents who had led the attack on the Ljutoč valley in September 1941, like the retired general Nikola Karanović, participated in the unveilings of these monuments. The fact that the names of the “Victims of Fascism,” including those of children, began to be carved on the plaques alongside those of fallen Partisan

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562 Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona (MUSK), Zbirka fotografija, br. 865, Spomen ploča u Martin Brodu.

563 For a photograph of this monument, see Ćučak, Nebljusi u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji, 38.
fighters, demonstrated the growing attention to memorializing civilian war victims during
the mid 1960s.\textsuperscript{564}

19. A monument for Ranko Šipka, a Partisan fighter from the Kulen Vakuf region who apparently opposed
the decision taken by Pero Dilies on 8 September 1941 to execute all of the Muslim men and boys at the

\textsuperscript{564} See, for example, \textit{Krajina}, “Krnjeuša svečano proslavila 25-togodišnjicu ustanka naroda. Obavezni smo
20. The monument plaque built in Martin Brod for “Fallen Fighters” [pali borci] and “110 patriots” who “fell from the fascist terror.” Source: Arhiv MUSK, Fond Zbirke fotografija bivšeg sreza i opštine Bihać, sheet 865, photograph 1.

The monuments for civilian war victims were not supposed to directly mention the nationality of the war dead. The Communist regime’s creation of the explicitly non-national category “Victims of Fascist Terror” allowed for the remembrance of all civilian war victims without any reference to their nationality. This rendered the remembrance of the war dead a non-national activity which in theory all Yugoslav citizens could engage in together. It appears that by not mentioning the nationality of the war dead the authorities hoped to achieve two objectives central to promoting the “Brotherhood and Unity” of Yugoslavia’s multi-national population: on one hand, they endeavored to
prevent “chauvinistic elements” from attempting to monopolize the remembrance of any particular nationality of war victims; on the other, they sought to stop such elements from pitting those mourning for victims of a certain nationality against the perpetrators of another.

By 1960, however, several of the best-known monuments in the wider Bihać region had violated the rule of constructing non-national monuments by omitting the category “Victims of Fascist Terror” from their inscriptions. Instead, the inscriptions referred to the victims only as “Serbs.” The monument at Garavice, built in 1949, indicated that “the people of the region and city of Bihać build this monument as a lasting memory of the 12,000 innocent Serbs who were brutally murdered by the Ustasha evildoers from June 1941 until October 1941.”565 In Zavalje, located southwest of Bihać, the inscription on the monument read as follows: “The Ustasha murderers slaughtered Serbs in the most brutal manner and then threw their bodies into this cave in 1941. On this place 884 of them found themselves in a mass grave because they loved their country and freedom.”566 And in Ripač, located around forty kilometers northwest of Kulen Vakuf, a monument had this inscription carved on it: “50 innocent Serbs from this region were brutally killed at this place by Ustasha murderers in 1941.”567

565 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Opštinski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a Bihać, Predmet: Podaci postojećih spomenika koji se nalaze na terenu opštine Bihać, 10 December 1960, 2.
566 Ibid., 4.
567 Ibid., 6. The inscription on another monument in the municipality of Velika Kladuša, located around 70 kilometers north of the municipality of Kulen Vakuf, was dedicated the memory of 2,500 “innocent Serbs.” See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH, kut. 173, OK SK BiH Velika Kladuša, Informacija o podizanju spomenika i drugih spomen objekata, 24 November 1959, 1.
This explicit nationalization of the victims most likely resulted from local Serbs in leadership positions in the League of Communists and SBNOR who made personal decisions to allow such inscriptions to be carved. No documents exist which could shed light on what their specific reasons were. Such inscriptions may have also resulted from the personal feelings of the members of the local councils that formed to organize the building of the monuments. These councils were usually composed of members of the League of Communists and SBNOR, and some may have felt that local Serbs, who had
given the contributions for the construction of the monuments, were strongly in favor of using explicitly national categories in the inscriptions. This may have led them to tacitly approve the inscriptions. The local authorities not directly involved with building the monuments might have then believed it unwise to insist that the inscriptions be changed from “Serbs” to “Victims of Fascist Terror” once the monuments had been unveiled as public sites of remembrance. Whatever the reasons for the creation of the nationalized inscriptions on these monuments, their existence attests to the considerable public space available to Serbs during the postwar years for mourning the deaths of their relatives and neighbors. The inscriptions clearly demonstrate that the local authorities had few qualms about allowing the remembrance for Serb war victims to sometimes take place in explicitly national terms. The tolerant stance of the authorities towards nationalized inscriptions on monuments for civilian war victims of Serbian nationality speaks to a more general level of support which the regime implicitly gave specifically to Serbs in mourning and remembering their dead.568

This lax attitude among some Serb members of the League of Communists and SBNOR may have contributed to emboldening the Orthodox clergy in attempting to more directly involve themselves in remembrance activities for Serbs killed during the war. In some cases, the Orthodox clergy sought to openly take the reins in reburying and commemorating Serb “Victims of Fascism.” In at least two instances during the 1950s in the wider Bihać region Orthodox priests succeeded in transforming the ruins of Orthodox

568 Jews were the only other group that succeeded in building monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina for their civilian war victims where the inscriptions specifically mentioned the confession and nationality of the victims. SBNOR’s archive in Sarajevo does not indicate that any similar monument was ever built for either Muslims or Croats. On monuments built for Jewish war victims in Yugoslavia, most of which were unveiled in 1952, see Emil Kerenji, “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 179-236.
churches in which the Ustashas had murdered large numbers of Serbs, or which they had destroyed to their foundations, into remembrance sites for the victims.\textsuperscript{569} More generally, the Orthodox clergy were active in assisting the families of Serb “Victims of Fascism” in reburying the remains of their relatives and neighbors which some had exhumed in the years after the war. Orthodox priests often led the reburial ceremonies at the village level. Their participation was not forbidden, but the fact that some would make it a point to declare that the victims had been murdered by “Muslims” or “Croats,” and not the “Ustashas,” alarmed the local authorities.\textsuperscript{570}

In general, the Communist regime was highly concerned, especially during the first decade after the war, about the tendency of the so-called “reactionary clergy” to act in ways that might destabilize national relations. With so much of the killing during the war having occurred on the basis of nationality and religion, the local authorities therefore never allowed Serb Orthodox priests, or any other members of the clergy, to assume any significant leadership role in commemorating the war dead.\textsuperscript{571} Still, this did not stop some members of the Orthodox clergy from continuously pressing the issue, as could be seen in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1960s. For example, in the Brčko region in 1962, an Orthodox priest and other so-called “Chetnik elements” reportedly criticized a monument built for “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist

\textsuperscript{569} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza o djelovanju klera na srezu bihaćkom, 20 April 1952, 1; Krajina, „Spomen kosturnica u Velikoj Kladuši,” 10 April 1954, 3.
\textsuperscript{570} ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 2.
\textsuperscript{571} On the concern among members of the Communist Party about the role of the Orthodox clergy in Bosnia and Herzegovina in spreading “chauvinism,” and negatively affecting national relations, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Politička situacija, 1948, 3. Stanje po okruzima: Okrug Bihać, Političko stanje, 1948, 1; Ibid., kut. 3, Neke karakteristike djelatnosti klera u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1954, 2.
Terror,” arguing that a separate monument specifically for Serb victims needed to be constructed. 572 Orthodox Church councils in the Mostar region were apparently active during the mid-1960s in attempting to build special monuments for Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror.” 573 And a report compiled in 1968 by the Central Committee of the League of Communist of Bosnia and Herzegovina concluded that “the Serbian Orthodox Church finds common ground with regards to the [Serb] victims from the war. The Church tries to present itself as the protector of the memory of these victims.” 574 Serbs therefore had their Orthodox Church, with its longstanding “cult of the dead,” as a strong form of support in mourning and remembering their war dead. The Orthodox clergy offered assistance in burying Serb victims, marking their graves, advocating for monuments to be built, and, in general, in mourning the Serb war dead through an elaborate set of death rituals.

Viewed together, the remembrance activities which the Orthodox Church provided and the Communist regime’s support for building monuments for “Victims of Fascist Terror” demonstrate that Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region did not face anything remotely close to the public culture of silence which their Muslim neighbors confronted. Certain restrictions did exist on the how Serbs could mourn and remember their war dead. The Orthodox Church was generally unable to overtly take the lead in building monuments for the dead and in leading large-scale commemorative activities. And the inscriptions on state-sanctioned monuments for “Victims of Fascist Terror” were usually

572 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Analiza o nekim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa u srezu Brčko, July 1962, 5.


574 Ibid., kut. 71p, Osvrt na idejne i političke posljedice djelovanja vjerskih zajednica, February 1968, 12.
not to be explicitly for Serbs, even if they comprised all the victims of a particular massacre. Even with such restrictions, Serbs in the region still enjoyed a significant amount of public space to engage in the mourning and remembrance of their war dead compared to what was available to their Muslim neighbors in the Ljutoč valley.

When it came to making sense of the mass killings, it appears that some Serbs in the greater Kulen Vakuf region tended not to interpret the events of 1941 through the categories that the League of Communists and SBNOR employed in their conceptualization of the war, that is, as a fascist versus anti-fascist struggle. In 1961, when members of the League of Communists went to the municipality of Drvar, a nearly all Serbian region located southeast of Kulen Vakuf, they discovered some startling information about the historical consciousness of some of the Serbs living there. While visiting a primary school, they posed a series of questions to the children about the Serbian epic poetry which they often heard sung in their villages by their parents, relatives and neighbors. A central theme running through many of the poems which the children frequently heard was the centuries-old historical struggle of Serbs against “Turks” for national liberation. ⁵⁷⁵ What disturbed the League members was how the stories in these poems had influenced the ways in which the children made sense of the Second World War. When asked for an example of a historic battle between Serbs and Muslims, whom many of the children saw as “Turks,” around sixty percent responded that 1941 was such an example. ⁵⁷⁶

Their answer was a far cry from the regime’s

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⁵⁷⁵ On the popularity of singing songs about historical struggles between Serbs and “Turks” in the Serbian villages in the Drvar region, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 204, Analiza o razvoju i jačanju organizacije Saveza komunista u savremenim uslovima sela Drvar, 19 May 1963, 7.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., kut. 186, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima na području opštine Drvar, June 1961, 4.
conceptualization of 1941 as a fascist versus anti-fascist struggle. Equally disturbing to the League members was the fact that many children made no distinction between the term “Muslim” and “Turk,” declaring matter-of-factly that “the Turks live in different parts of our region.” The responses that the children gave suggested that many viewed the mass killings of Serbs 1941 a yet another episode of what the epic poetry depicted as the centuries-old struggle between Serbs and “Turks” in the wider region. The report which League members prepared about their experiences with the school children indicated that they believed that this sensibility was rooted not only in “primitivism and backwardness,” but also especially in what the children heard at home about the war.

In their villages many Serb children in the Kulen Vakuf region learned that Muslims, or what many of their parents, relatives, and neighbors simply referred to as “Turks,” had participated in the massacres of Serbs in 1941. The idea that the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf, as well as those in the rest of the Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley, were “Turks” and “Ustashas” resonated with more than a few adult Serbs in the region. It appears that some Serb children had a tendency to filter this information

577 Ibid., 5.
578 Ibid.
579 The predominance of the family in transmitting historical information about the war was a widespread phenomenon throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. While children often learned in school that the abstract categories of “fascists” (e.g., the Germans, Italians, etc) and “domestic traitors” (e.g. the Chetniks, Ustashas, etc.) had been the the enemies of the Partisan Movement, this did not mean they fully internalized such an interpretation. Often what they heard at home was more important. As the notes from a meeting for several committees of the League of Communists in the Bosnian Krajina indicated in 1959, Serb school children sometimes answered the question, “Who was the enemy of our people during the war?” by stating simply: “Our Croat neighbors.” See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH, kut. 169, Zapisnik sa savjetovanja članova sekretarijata Sreskih komiteta, nekih članova Sreskog komiteta, sekretara opštinskih komiteta Saveza komunista i predsjednika NOO-e sa terena srezova Banja Luke, Prijedor i Bihaća, 14 September 1959, 8.
580 Ibid., kut. 161, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Informacija o oblicima ispoljavanja šovinizma na opštini Kulen Vakuf, 28 December 1958, 1-3; On the widespread use by Serbs of the word “Turk” and the curse
through the lens of Serbian epic poetry, bits and pieces of which they often heard in their
villages, which glorified Serbian victories over “the Turks” and held up Serb victims of
Ottoman brutality as heroic martyrs. The result appears to have been an understanding
of the mass killings of Serbs during the summer of 1941 as yet another episode of
violence which Serbs had endured at the hands of “the Turks.” As this historical
sensibility crystallized, it was therefore not surprising that some Serbs in the region were
more than comfortable with explaining the mass killing of the Muslims from the Ljutoč
valley as a form of justified revenge. This overarching interpretation of the 1941
massacres of Serbs and Muslims had the effect of reinforcing an historical consciousness
among some Serbs in the region in which they viewed themselves as victims and heroic
fighters, and Muslims as their oppressors and long-standing enemies.

Not all Serbs interpreted 1941 through this lens. There were more than a few who
owed their lives to Muslims who took great risks to save them, their families, and their
neighbors between June and August 1941. They had vivid memories of Muslims hiding

“Fuck your Turkish mother!” [jebem ti tursku majku!] in the wider Bihać region, see in Ibid., kut. 165,
Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području sreza Bihać, 31 December 1958, 1.

581 While participating at a meeting of the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the League
of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the topic of national relations, Salim Ćerić criticized what he
saw as the tendency in Serbian epic poetry to glorify the extermination of Muslims and their conversion
to Christianity. The catalyst for his criticism appears to have been a television program, which aired in
Bosnia and Herzegovina during 1964, that showed a celebration for Petar Petrović-Njegoš (1812-1851), the
former metropolitan and ruler of Montenegro. The program included information about his most famous
epic poem “Gorski vjenac” [The Mountain Wreath], which Ćerić said glorified the mass slaughter of
Muslims. As a result, the poem was creating a general “anti-Turkish” consciousness which was negatively
affecting Yugoslavia’s Muslims. Ćerić said to the Serbs present at the meeting: “If you would hear about
the glorification of the extermination of Serbs from such and such a century, you would not feel
comfortable. The mood among Chetniks during the [Second World] war was inspired by such upbringing
(i.e., the glorification of poems like “The Mountain Wreath”).” See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 46a (F-
7), Magnetofoński snimak sa sastanka Ideološke komisije CK SK BiH o međunacionalnim odnosima, 9
June 1964, 9, 11, 44.

582 Interview with Jovica Đilas on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod; Dimitar Reljić on 10 October 2008 in
Martin Brod.
them from the Ustashas, or telling them where they should and should not go in order to avoid them. These Serbs were opposed to others who would sometimes preach hatred for the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley. Whenever possible, they would tell their neighbors that among the Muslims in Kulen Vakuf, and in the other villages in the Ljutoč valley, there were many “good people.” In general, however, it seems that most Serbs in the region did not speak very much about the September 1941 massacres of the Muslims. Some decided never to talk about what had happened, and, as a result, their children grew up unaware that the massacres had even taken place.

But on occasion, under the right circumstances, other Serbs would speak about what they had seen and experienced during the mass killings of the Muslims. Sometimes they would even do so with their Muslim neighbors. Unlike most Muslims in the Ljutoč valley, Derviš Kurtagić, the veterinarian for the region, would frequently travel to the Serbian villages of the region to assist villagers in caring for their animals. In 1956, while visiting a Serbian house in Prkosi, the village near where the September massacres began, he spoke with a woman who he knew liked to drink. Eventually she became drunk, and then suddenly began speaking about what it was like on 6 September 1941, the day when the insurgents murdered Muslims near her house. “Hey doctor,” she apparently said, “I was here when our unlucky ones killed your people. I could hear the screams of women and children. I couldn’t stand to listen anymore so I shut myself in a room so as to hear less.”

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583 Interview with Svetozar Tankosić on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
584 Interview with Dimitar Reljić on 10 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
585 Interview with Reuf Anadolac on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
586 Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 31.
and, upon hearing what her neighbor was speaking about, also decided to share her memories: “Hey my doctor, I couldn’t stand to listen so I went into a room and pulled all of the pillows over my head so I wouldn’t hear the screams and cries for help.” These sorts of comments indicate that some Serbs in the region were very much aware of the massacres, which is not surprising. After all, many had participated in some way, either through directly killing Muslims, or by stealing from Muslim houses and burning them down. Others, like these two women, had been in close proximity when the killings had taken place, and had heard the massacres as they unfolded, or had directly witnessed them in some way.

And yet, for the most part, it seems, Serbs did not regularly speak in public about the September 1941 massacres. This suggests that, although most Serbs in the region knew about the mass killings of Muslims, they appear to have developed their own culture of silence when it came to publicly speaking about them. A crucial element at the heart of the Serbian silence about the massacres of the Muslims must have been a desire among many to avoid implicating themselves in the killings and plunder of Muslim property. Some Serbs in the region who had participated in the massacres had become members of the League of Communists and others had risen to become officers, captains, colonels and even generals in the Yugoslav People’s Army. They were now all publicly committed to supporting the ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity,” regardless of how much or how little they truly believed in it. In light of this postwar political context, speaking publicly about the mass murder of their Muslim neighbors, in which some of these men had directly and indirectly participated, was simply not an option. For some,

587 Ibid.
this may have been rooted in a sense of guilt, and perhaps shame, for having murdered their Muslim neighbors, the vast majority of whom they knew had not been Ustaschas and were guilty of no crime. For others, fear of perhaps one day having to answer for their war crimes may have been what prevented them from speaking, although the chances of that actually occurring were slim. One Muslim from Klisa, speaking about the Serbs who had directly and indirectly participated in the September massacres, described their attitude in the following way: “I killed your family but now we have Brotherhood and Unity.” The need to uphold this ideology, at least on the surface, combined with the uneasiness of living with having participated in, or witnessed, the mass murder of their Muslims neighbors, were most likely the central elements at work in the creation of the Serbian culture of silence about the September massacres.

In any event, talking about the mass killings of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley was not on the mind of the vast majority Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf and Bihać regions in the decades after the war. Instead, what many were increasingly fixated on was their own suffering during the war, and promoting the remembrance of it. The issue that caused the most friction among Serbs in the wider region with regards to the remembrance of wartime mass killings was not the massacres of Muslims, but rather what to do with sites where Serbs had been killed. A chief concern was Garavice, the site outside of Bihać where it was widely believed the Ustaschas had murdered as many as 12,000 Serbs. In 1949, the local government of the region and city of Bihać had built a modest monument

588 Interview with Adem Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Klisa.

589 For the documentation produced by the District Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators on the the mass killings of Serbs at Garavice, see AJ, Fond 110, DKUZ, kut. 493, dos. br. 4942, Zapsnik o zločinima na području Bihaća, 28 September 1945, 1-2; Ibid., 7 August 1946, 10-12.
next to the road which passes by the vast site where the killings had taken place. The plaque’s inscription referred to the victims explicitly as Serbs and indicated that “Ustasha evildoers” had murdered 12,000 of them. But no measures had been taken at that time to exhume the remains of the victims from the mass graves where the Ustashas had buried them. And, as a result, no work had been done to identify the victims and determine the precise number of them.

Most members of SBNOR in the region expressed a desire to eventually exhume the remains of the victims and build a mass grave for them that would be marked with a monument much larger than the one erected in 1949. A number of veterans hoped that one day all of the names of the victims would be on display. Some began to work on the enormous task of exhuming the remains during the early to mid 1950s, but it appears that the sizable funds necessary for the completion of the project were lacking, and thus the work stalled out.590 By 1956, an official council for building a new monument at Garavice formed which declared that action needed to be taken “out of respect for the Victims of Fascism” to stop the cultivation of wheat and grazing of livestock on the site, and to mark it as a major site of war remembrance in Bosnia and Herzegovina.591 Around the same time, the council apparently tried to carry out some preliminary work toward exhuming the remains of the victims by probing several possible mass graves in order to determine their depth. Other sub-commissions were then formed for dealing with the council’s financial matters, obtaining building materials for the future

590 On the beginnings of the exhumations, see Krajina, “Prenos ostataka žrtava fašističkog terora u Bihaću,” 29 November 1954, 5; On the need for more funds to complete the reburials, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 148, Zapisnik sa sastanka Sreskog komiteta Saveza komunista Bihać, 15 February 1955, 5. The information on some veterans wanting the names of the victims put on display comes from an interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać.

monument, organizing volunteer work actions, collecting information about the victims, and for obtaining ownership of the land where the monument park was to be located.\textsuperscript{592} The council even made contact with an architect and sculptor who were asked to propose possible designs for the site.\textsuperscript{593}

Yet again, the problem of insufficient financial resources for the project appeared to stymie the council. When a representative from the Land Bureau for the Protection of Monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina [Zemaljski zavod za zaštitu spomenika Bosne i Hercegovine] visited the area during the summer of 1956, he noted that the council had yet to undertake any real work due to its lack of money.\textsuperscript{594} Nonetheless, the local authorities continued to use the site as a focal point for yearly commemorations related to the war, as had been the case since the early years after 1945.\textsuperscript{595} During the late 1950s, the council lapsed further and further into inactivity with regard to its stated intention of building a new monument on the site. SBNOR’s report at the end of 1959 on the status of existing monuments and graves, as well as other sites related to the war still unmarked across Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicated that not enough was being done to transform Garavice into a more significant site of remembrance.\textsuperscript{596}

At the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, more towns and villages in the wider Bihać region began to build monuments for “Victims of Fascism,” the vast majority of

\textsuperscript{592} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{593} Ibid., The architect was a lecturer [docent] at the University of Zagreb named Vladimir Turina and the sculptor was Vojin Bakić.

\textsuperscript{594} ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Izvještaj o službenom putovanju u Drvar, Bosanski Petrovac i Bihać izvršen na osnovu naloge Zemaljskog zavoda za zaštitu spomenika, br. 1122/56, 18 June 1956, 5-6.


\textsuperscript{596} ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Izvještaj SBNOR BiH od III Kongresa Saveza boraca NOR-a Jugoslavije do kraja 1959 godine, Spomenici NOB-e u BiH, 1959, 64.
which were for Serbs. Local organs of SBNOR, in cooperation with other socio-political organizations and interested citizens, built monuments in Zavalje and Ripač.\textsuperscript{597} Then Serb Partisan veterans who had left the region after the war for Vojvodina began collecting donations for a monument in Bugar.\textsuperscript{598} The increased attention in the Bihać region to building monuments for mostly Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror” reflected the broader trend at work at this time in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the remembrance of such victims began to take on increased importance. In other regions of the republic, such as Livno in western Herzegovina, sizable plans were drawn up to close many of the pits where Ustaschas had murdered Serbs during the war, and to build monuments on the sites in remembrance of them.\textsuperscript{599}

But Garavice, which was the most talked about site of mass killing in the Bihać region due the large numbers of Serbs murdered there, continued to remain unchanged. Throughout 1961-1963, some members of SBNOR (which was renamed SUBNOR [Savez udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata] in 1961) progressively increased their level of criticism about the lack of attention to the site.\textsuperscript{600} As a report issued in 1963 by the organization in Bihać indicated:

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\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{597} Ibid., Opštinski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a Bihać, Predmet: Podaci o postojećih spomenika koji se nalaze na terenu opštine Bihać, 10 December 1960, 2-6.

\textsuperscript{598} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 199, Pismo grupe boraca koji si naseljeni u Vojvodini, 12 January 1961. The monument was eventually built in 1962. See in Ibid., kut. 195, Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista Bihać, Materijali sa VI. Redovne konferencije, 14 June 1962, 28.

\textsuperscript{599} ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Sreski odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a Livno, Predmet: 10 projekata za zatvaranje jama na području općine Livno, 24 December 1960.

\textsuperscript{600} Ibid., Informacija o stanju grobalja palih boraca i žrtava fašističkog terora na terenu Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine koncem 1961. god., part II, 1; Ibid., Glavni odbor Saveza boraca NOR-a Bosne i Hercegovine, Elaborat o grobljima palih boraca i žrtava fašističkog terora na teritoriji Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, December 1961, part III, 10; AUSK, SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 184, Informacija o dosadašnjim rezultatima na proslavama značajnih događaja iz NOB-e vezanih za 20-godišnjicu ustanka
At many meetings for the veteran’s organization, and at other meetings, this issue is discussed as a very large political problem. One hears criticism that it’s time to take measures to build a cemetery on that site. Who can justify that today livestock are grazing there? Some people who have been to the site have written to newspapers and have sent pictures taken from one of the hills, criticizing this type of relationship towards the innocent victims who were killed there. This year something needs to be done, at least to deal with the legal-property relations with the peasants (who own the land). For this cemetery, help should be sought from the Republic because this site has the largest number of victims of any in the Republic, and it still has not been dealt with.601

The letters that citizens sent to newspapers which this report referred to were often highly emotional pleas for the condition of the site to be improved. One such letter writer, after criticizing what he or she saw as the miniature nature of the existing monument, and the fact that livestock were grazing on the site, went on to say the following: “It appears that we love the victims only in words, because a monument which would show respect to those innocent victims who were killed in horrible ways has yet to be built.”602 The fact that such letters were even published speaks to the substantial degree of latitude available to those who wished to voice their opinions about the need to more adequately remember Serb “Victims of Fascism.” That SUBNOR members discussed such letters behind closed doors, and felt compelled to take action because of the complaints and criticisms which letter writers publicly voiced, highlights the influence these individuals were able to exert. And this existence of such discussions illuminates the seriousness with which SUBNOR members took these issues.

Others who were frustrated with the lack of attention to Garavice decided to communicate their concerns directly to President Josip Broz Tito. In an anonymous letter


written in 1967, an individual who identified him or herself only as “one of the survivors,” issued a searing criticism about the inadequacy of the monument and the corrupt behavior of the local authorities in Bihać who had contributed to the unacceptable condition of the site. After briefly describing the monument on the site which was built in 1949, the letter writer went on to say: “Seventeen years have passed from that time until today, millions and millions of dinars (the Yugoslav currency) have gone down the River Una, but a monument at the end of the road is waiting to be built, which would turn into a symbol that would remind us of the dirty past, that would tell the younger generations that here, under the ground, 60,000 litres of blood were spilled, and that here 12,000 screams merged together.”603 After this stark depiction of the victims and the horrors they endured, the letter writer attacked the local authorities:

Since the issue is about such a large number of victims, perhaps it is necessary to go and ask the republic, or even the entire community of Yugoslavia for help, if the municipality does not have the means. But this has not been done to this day because our leaders in Bihać put out new urban plans while filling their already full pockets with extra pay, and then they spend their work days sipping coffee out of cups. There is not a single office in the municipality which is not armed with cups and the other requisites for preparing coffee.

I think that it is high time that our leaders, and I’m thinking here of those who are responsible in our municipality, understand that the brothers, sisters, children, and other relatives of those who were innocently murdered at Garavice are living and waiting for when they will be able to look with raised heads at a solidly-constructed monument, and not the present one which is slowly falling apart.604


604 Ibid. Such letters were not simply read and filed away. This letter, which had originally been sent directly to the office of President Tito, prompted the Republican organ of SUBNOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina to request that measures be taken to deal with the Garavice site “in the spirit of the law regulating cemeteries.” In other words, the organization of Partisan veterans urged other governmental organs to take action to deal with the site in such a way that would offer repect to the many victims murdered there. See Ibid., Savez udruženja boraca NOR BiH, Republički odbor, Pismo za Republički sekretarijat za zdravstvo i socijalnu politiku SR BiH, 9 March 1967.
This letter writer sought not only to speak in the name of the victims murdered at Garavice; he or she spoke perhaps more so for the survivors and their relatives, portrayed here as impatiently waiting for a proper monument to be built. This letter also pointed to possible reasons as to why building a new monument and mass grave at Garavice was proceeding so slowly. The laziness of the local authorities, that is, their tendency to spend the day drinking coffee, as well as their corrupt activities, exemplified in the act of “filling their already full pocket with extra pay,” appear to have been two possible reasons as to why the near universal desire to improve the site at Garavice had yet to transform from wish into reality.

According to Jusuf Zjakic, who was Secretary of the League of Communists in Bihać during the 1960s, there were two other main factors that hampered the effort to build a new monument at Garavice. The first was that the republican authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina always considered Garavice to be less important than the concentration camp Jasenovac, which the Communist regime portrayed as the site where the Ustaschas murdered 700,000 Yugoslavs during the war. Most of the camp was located in the Republic of Croatia, but a part had also stretched into Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, the bulk of the resources available at the republican level for exhumations and large-scale monument building were usually reserved for that site and not Garavice. As the number 700,000 has been shown to have been a wild exaggeration. The most reliable research indicates that just over 100,000 Yugoslavs—mostly Serbs, Jews, Roma and other “anti-fascists”—were murdered at Jasenovac. On the sizable amount of funds that the Communist regime made available for exhumations and Monument building at Jasenovac during the early and mid 1960s, as well as for research about the fate of the victims murdered at the camps, see in Ibid., Savez Udruženja Boraca NOR-a BiH Predsjednštvo, Predmet: Utvrđivanje zločina izvršenih nad žrtvama u Jasenovcu, April 29, 1964; Dušan Misirica, Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac, 1941-1945., Uređivanje masovnih grobnica učesnika NOR-a i žrtava terora u selu Donja Gradina, undated document, (perhaps 1966); Izvještaj ekipe antropologa o nalazima pri iskopavanju grobnica na Gradini kod Jasenovca, 22, 24-25 June 1964; Izvještaj o izvršenoj ekspertizi kostura ekshumiranih iz groba u selu Gradini, 1 July 1964; Izvještaj o pregledu ekshumiranih kostura u selu Gradina, 24-25 June 1964. On the coverage in the Bihać region of the opening of the
second, perhaps more important reason had to do with intense disputes among the mostly Serbian members of SUBNOR in Bihać. A number of the Partisan veterans vehemently insisted on the number of 12,000 victims, even though evidence did not exist for such a high number. Apparently since an agreement could not be reached about the number of Serbs murdered at Garavice, the task of building a new monument, while desired by most, remained permanently sidelined throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s.606

Whatever the reasons for the lack of progress, the existence of letters sent to newspapers, socio-political organizations, and high-level political personalities illustrate the considerable space that was available for those who wished to advocate for the remembrance of “Victims of Fascism.” In the Bihać region, these victims were overwhelmingly of Serbian nationality. The letters about Garavice were not exceptions, but rather emblematic of others written about sites of mass killing throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina which began to be sent with increasing frequency during the 1960s. Many of the writers appear to have been of Serbian nationality, and often were related in some way to the victims about whom they wrote. The general content of the letters was virtually identical: criticism about the lack of monuments in certain areas, or criticism where the existing monuments were in very poor condition.607

In July of 1969, an article was published in Krajina, the newspaper for the Bihać region, about an elderly Serb woman who was visiting Garavice, and mourning her lost monument at Jasenovac, see Krajina, “Svečanosti povodom Dana borca. Jasenovačkim žrtvama,” 4 July 1966, 1; “Otkriven spomenik jasenovačkim žrtvama. Vječne vatre na grobnici palih,” 9 July 1966, 1.

606 Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on December 5, 2008 in Bihać.

relatives by placing a few flowers on the monument. She was shocked by the state of the monument and the overall poor condition of the site. “Why is this place forgotten?” she wondered out loud.\textsuperscript{608} The existence of such an article about the state of Garavice and the struggle to build a new monument there yet again suggests that significant a amount of public space was available for Serbs to advocate for monuments to be built for their victims, or to criticize the poor condition of existing monuments. A similar type of article about a Muslim from the Ljutoč valley visiting Golubnjača and asking why that place had been forgotten would have been unthinkable.

Two years before this article about the elderly Serb woman at Garavice was published, \textit{Krajina} ran a shorter article about a fifty-seven year old Muslim woman from Kulen Vakuf named Ćamka Burzić. She was thirty-one when the September massacres took place and somehow survived. Like nearly all Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, she almost lost members of her family in the mass killings, including her husband. And like the rest of her Muslim neighbors, none of their bodies would have been permitted to be recovered and buried after the war, and no gravestone or monument would have been built in remembrance of them.\textsuperscript{609} They would have been forgotten, unlike the Serb victims at Garavice, for whom a small monument had been built already by 1949. But unlike the attention that \textit{Krajina} devoted to the anguish of the elderly Serb woman at Garavice mourning for her lost relatives, and her disappointment at the poor condition of the site where they had been killed, this newspaper article did not mention a single word about Ćamka Burzić’s wartime experiences. This was a strange anomaly for a personal

\textsuperscript{608} \textit{Krajina}, “Starica i spomenik,” 17 July, 1969, 7

\textsuperscript{609} Interview with Nataša Kadić on 4 August 2010 (on the telephone).
profile in light of the all-important place of any individual’s wartime exploits or suffering in postwar Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. Instead, readers found out about Ćamka Burzić’s involvement in “work actions,” her efforts to gather funds to help the survivors of the 1967 earthquake in the Republic of Macedonia, and her son Halid, who was described as a hard-working member of the League of Communists and president of the local organ of Socialist Alliance of Working People [Socijalistički savez radnog naroda]. Whatever losses she experienced during the war, and whatever her feelings may have been about the lack of graves and monuments for the victims of the September massacres, remained unknown in this newspaper article about her. Unlike her Serb counterpart at Garavice, it was as if the mass killings in 1941 had never had any impact on Ćamka Burzić’s life.  

The newspaper’s strikingly different treatment of each woman’s wartime suffering—from full acknowledgement of the elderly Serb woman’s losses to the complete omission of those that Ćamka Burzić suffered—was emblematic of the radical postwar differences in the way that the Communist regime responded to the remembrance of Serb and Muslim civilian war victims in the Kulen Vakuf region. For the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley, the public culture of silence was their only option; for their Serb neighbors, there was a sizable public culture of remembrance, which could be practiced through exhumations, reburials, and monument building. Most of these acts of remembrance were usually performed in non-national terms, although on occasion in explicitly national terms, such as when the Orthodox Church managed to participate, and when official monuments included inscriptions specifically for Serbian victims. Even if a

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direct reference to the nationality of the victims was absent, most were still very much aware of what their nationality was, and that it was the central reason for why they were killed. Given that the Communist regime was explicitly devoted to using war remembrance as a means to promote the “Brotherhood and Unity” of all nationalities, such a vast inequality in the policy of remembrance for Serbs and Muslims was striking and perplexing.

An explanation for this vast difference must be sought in an examination of the specific nature of the wartime mass killings of Serbs and Muslims, and the complex development of the Partisan Movement before, during, and after the massacres of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley in September 1941. When it came to the mass killings of Serbs and their postwar remembrance, the situation was fairly clear-cut. Croat and Muslim Ustashas had carried out the mass killings of Serbs. The Communist Party considered the Ustashas to be fascist enemies when the war started and they remained fascist enemies when it ended. Their victims, who aside from Jews, Roma, and anti-fascist Muslims and Croats, were overwhelmingly of Serbian nationality, fit perfectly into the abstract postwar category of “Victims of Fascist Terror.” Therefore, no explicit political dilemma existed for the Communist regime when it came to whether these victims were to be remembered. They were to be remembered, although given the Communist regime’s commitment to building a multi-national state their remembrance was to take place in non-national terms. The creation of the non-national category “Victims of Fascist Terror” was designed to facilitate this type of remembrance in the context of the new multi-national socialist state. The only complicating factors with regards to remembering the Serb “Victims of Fascism” had to do with whether or not to
indicate their nationality on monuments (which was sometimes done contrary to official policy), and whether or not to allow the Serbian Orthodox Church to participate in the government-sanctioned burials and commemorations of these victims (which was generally prohibited).

When it came to the mass killings of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, and their postwar remembrance, the wartime situation was complex and presented a political dilemma which posed a serious problem for the Communist regime. Serb insurgents from the Kulen Vakuf region had carried out the mass killings of innocent Muslims from the Ljutoč valley in September 1941. These killings were no different in level of brutality and motivated no less by nationalist hatred than the killings which the Ustashas had carried out against Serbs in the region earlier in the summer. The main difference was that the Ustashas were those who began the extreme violence through a desire to rid the NDH of Serbs, while the Serb insurgents responded in equal ferocity out of a desire for revenge. Some Serbs were further motivated, it seems, by long-standing feelings of hatred for Muslims, which originated before the war for various reasons. By the end of the war, a large number of these Serb insurgents had joined the Partisans, whose goal was to defeat both occupying and domestic fascists, and to build a new Yugoslav state based on socialism and the equality of all nationalities.

The Muslim civilians whom the Serb insurgents had murdered were just as innocent as the Serbs whom the Ustashas had massacred, but the Serb murderers of the Muslims had by war’s end become members of the Partisans. In short, over the course of the war, they had become anti-fascists. Since the Partisans were those who had ultimately defeated both occupying and domestic fascists, it was therefore politically
impossible in the postwar period to treat the Muslim civilians who the Serb insurgents had murdered as “Victims of Fascist Terror.” This was the case because the Serb insurgents who eventually became Partisans simply could not be characterized in the postwar period as murderers of “Victims of Fascist Terror.”

The innocent Muslim civilian victims of the September massacres thus occupied a strange position in that no fascists could be identified as their killers. This made it impossible for them to be treated as “Victims of Fascist Terror,” and thus it was impossible in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina for them to be categorized as official war victims. As a result, they could not be remembered in the postwar period, and monuments could not be built for them. If the Muslims were to be considered as “Victims of Fascist Terror,” then their killers, some of whom eventually became Chetniks, but many more of whom became Partisans, would absolutely have to be categorized as fascists. This was politically impossible since the vast majority of the perpetrators of the September massacres had by the end of the war become those who had defeated the various fascist armies.

Therefore, Communist remembrance policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was never explicitly formulated by the League of Communists or SUBNOR along the lines of nationality, nonetheless had a clear-cut, albeit implicit, highly nationalized dimension: Serbs whom the Ustashas had killed could be publicly remembered; Muslims killed by Serb insurgents who later became Partisans (or even by Chetniks who later became Partisans), could not. In this sense, the regime’s policy of war remembrance for “Victims of Fascist Terror” was skewed against Muslims and in favor of Serbs. This aspect of war remembrance policy was a strange anomaly for a multi-national socialist
state like Yugoslavia whose Communist leadership based much of its legitimacy explicitly on the principle of equality, most especially with regards to the treatment of citizens of different nationalities.
Chapter Six

National Relations in the Shadow of Mass Killing

Although official war remembrance policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina for “Victims of Fascist Terror” was explicitly non-national, it was, in practice, implicitly pro-Serb and anti-Muslim. Given the existence of this striking inequality, the nature of postwar national relations in the shadow of mass killing thus emerges as an essential issue. With regards to the Kulen Vakuf region, three relevant questions warrant attention: First, what were national relations like after the war? Second, how did the Communist regime promote and police national relations, and in what ways did government policy affect them? Finally, in what ways did the legacy and remembrance of wartime violence and Communist war remembrance policy impact national relations? These questions are often interlocking, and answering them requires a simultaneous analysis of the state of national relations, government policy, and the impact of the war. The primary analytical lens remains the Kulen Vakuf region, but reference to the wider region, as well as to the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is necessary in order to provide adequate context and comparative examples.

In some cases, the massacres in the Kulen Vakuf region paradoxically strengthened relations between individuals of different nationalities because of the lengths some went to in order to save the lives of their neighbors. At the same time, the killings left others deeply embittered and locked in a mindset in which nationality, and especially how wartime events framed one’s perception of a another person based on his or her nationality, was of crucial importance in determining friends and enemies. A much larger group appears to have been capable of getting along at the level of everyday
interaction, in large part due to the Communist regime’s intensive work on promoting and policing “Brotherhood and Unity.” An important dynamic which emerges in light of newly available sources from the archive of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina is that sizable numbers of people could rapidly change their views of their neighbors of different nationalities in the aftermath of incidents (e.g., fights, murders, etc.), switching from positive relations to calling for revenge against entire nationalities. Incidents which conjured up painful memories from the war were usually an important factor in such instances. Through an analysis of how the Communist regime attempted to use war remembrance to promote “Brotherhood and Unity,” the case of Kulen Vakuf demonstrates that the need to maintain silence about the massacres of the Muslims ultimately was more important than promoting national equality. Indeed, the Communist regime had no qualms about characterizing as “chauvinists” Muslims who asked why monuments could be built for Serb “Victims of Fascism” but not for Muslims murdered by Serb insurgents in 1941.

During the early years after the war, relations between a number of Serbs and Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region were positive, which was perhaps surprising given the tremendous amount of mass killing which had occurred during 1941. For some, the positive postwar relations had roots in the long-standing tradition of friendship in the region between Serbs and Muslims which predated the Second World War. This tradition was especially strong between Muslims in Kulen Vakuf and Serbs in the Donji Lapac region (located in Croatia) who had established long-term friendships due to the close trading ties which had existed between them for many years before the war. Kulen

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611 Interview with Murat Mušeta on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
Vakuf was the traditional trading centre in the region, and Serbs from Donji Lapac had been coming to sell their goods at the Thursday market for generations. Muslims would often go to Donji Lapac to hear music, and to drink and dance. The mass killings had strained some of these friendships, but it appears that others remained strong.  

More than a few of these friendships emerged from the war much stronger because of the lengths that some Muslims went to save their Serbian neighbors between June and August 1941, and the efforts that some Serbs made to rescue their Muslim neighbors during the September massacres. Mujo Dervišević’s wife exemplified how the risks Serbs and Muslims took to save one another translated into deep respect and admiration for one another after the war. As her daughter Đula recalled, she would always praise the Serb insurgent who saved her and her children, stressing that, to her, he was like a member of her family. Sead Kadić’s grandfather held a similarly warm place in his heart for the Serb who had helped him escape certain death in September 1941. He warned him that “terrible things are about to happen,” and helped him to run away at a certain point from the insurgents during the massacres. When some of the Muslims in Kulen Vakuf would sometimes speak negatively about their Serb neighbors because of the war-time mass killings which had caused them so much loss, Kadić’s grandfather was known for defending some of his Orthodox neighbors, saying repeatedly: “Not all Serbs are the same.” Mujo Dervišević, who had barely escaped being murdered at Golubnjača, was known for not expressing hatred towards all Serbs after the

612 Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo; Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

613 Interview with Đula Seferović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.

614 Interview with Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.
war. He was extremely upset every time he ran into the Serb who had stood ready to cut his throat at the opening of the pit, but he did not project his feelings about this man on to the rest of his Orthodox neighbors. After all, his wife and children had survived the September massacres thanks to a Serb insurgent. Other Muslims and Serbs in the region who owed their lives and those of their families to their Serb and Muslim neighbors who rescued them during the mass killings held similarly positive sentiments about those who had saved them. And they too had no qualms about publicly voicing them.

These friendships between Serbs and Muslims, whether rooted in prewar relationships or in wartime acts of rescue or, more often, in some combination of the two, appear to have generally carried over into the postwar period. As a result, some warm friendships sometimes existed between a number of Serbs and Muslims who had lost relatives in the mass killings which the Ustashas and insurgents had committed. Branko Dobrac’s mother lost her husband in 1941 when several Muslim Ustashas came to her village and murdered him. After the war, however, her best friends were a number of Muslim women who lived near her house. They frequently visited one another and drank coffee together. This was not an uncommon occurrence among a number of other Serb and Muslim neighbors who had lost relatives and neighbors. The losses that some Serbs and Muslims suffered at the hands of the Ustashas and insurgents did not automatically destroy their friendships across the lines of the nationality. For these individuals, it

615 Interview with Đula Seferović on 13 October 2008 in Ostrovica.

616 Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo; Svetozar Tankosić on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
appears that it was a person’s character and behavior which mattered most, not his or her nationality.  

The positive relations between a number of Serbs and Muslims in the region were clearly visible once each community began rebuilding their respective houses of worship in Kulen Vakuf during the mid to late 1950s. The Ustashas had destroyed the town’s Serbian Orthodox Church in 1941 which was located on a hill near the source of the Ostrovica River. When Serbs began rebuilding it, they received assistance from some of their Muslim neighbors in Kulen Vakuf. Several donated building materials, even though such materials were scarce at the time. Others contributed some of the little money they had. In 1962, members of the League of Communists in the region were surprised to discover the man who had given the largest contribution for the church’s new bell, as well as for the construction of a new bell tower, was a Muslim.

617 Interview with Branko Dobrac on 1 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

618 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać.

619 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 195, Informacija o nekim pitanjima ideološkog i političkog djelovanja osnovnih organizacija Saveza komunista na opštini Bihać, 2 February 1962, 5-6. On the reaction of the local authorities to the building of the new Orthodox church in Kulen Vakuf, see Ibid., kut. 196 I, Narodni odbor sreza Bihać, Komisija za vjerska pitanja, Informacija o stanju i nekim problemima u razvitku odnosa država-crkva (na srezu), 1962, 3.
This sort of generosity of some Muslims towards their Orthodox neighbors swung in the opposite direction as well. As the town’s Muslims began rebuilding their mosque which the insurgents had burned to the ground in 1941, some of their Serb neighbors gave what money they could to help. In some cases, these Serbs were related by marriage to some of the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf. Since their Muslim kumovi [godfathers] had already given contributions for the construction of a new Orthodox Church, they felt obligated to give money for a new mosque. Such ties by marriage,
when combined with those rooted in prewar trading relations, and especially those which came to the fore during the war when some Serb and Muslim neighbors took great risks to save one another, were the central elements of these postwar friendships. These were the main connections which provided the foundation for genuinely positive national relations in the Kulen Vakuf region immediately after the war among more than a few Serbs and Muslims. For many of these individuals, it was the horrendous experience of 1941—and, specifically, surviving the mass killings because of what their neighbors of different nationalities did to save them—that actually strengthened national relations more than anything else. The most extreme violence which had ever occurred in the region thus had the paradoxical effect of fortifying the historic tradition of friendship among a number of individuals across the lines of nationality.

Aside from these deep friendships between some Serbs and Muslims, many others in the Kulen Vakuf region also appeared to be getting along during the initial years after the war, despite the recent history of mass killing. A significant element at work in creating these seemingly positive relations, which in many cases may have been more superficial, was the Communist regime’s energetic cultivation and policing of the “Brotherhood and Unity” of all citizens. As a Serb Partisan from Martin Brod remembered: “Relations were good, but they had to be good. Brotherhood and Unity was the law and that was it.”621 The Party used several methods during the years after the war for fostering what it saw as an acceptable level of “Brotherhood and Unity.” Approaches that the local authorities employed, which did not require repressive methods

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621 Interview with Dimitar Reljić on 10 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
and direct coercion, included the staging of celebrations, such as President Tito’s birthday on 25 May or 27 July 1941, which was the day that marked the start of the Communist insurgency. These were engineered, in part, to provide citizens of different nationalities with common holidays to celebrate. Along the same lines, the ritual of publicly carrying wreaths on 4 July, “The Day of the Fighter” [Dan borca], as well as on many other commemorative days related to the war, to the graves of “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror” was another method the Party used to mobilize citizens of different nationalities together in remembering the war dead. On such holidays, as was the case in Kulen Vakuf in 1956, Partisan veterans made plans to deliver speeches and to tell their war stories. Like their comrades throughout the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina, their objective was to emphasize the multi-national character of the Partisan army, and to stress the importance of the “Brotherhood and Unity” of all nationalities for which its members had explicitly fought and died. The Communist regime also organized a host of different “work actions” [radne akcije] such as building roads and rail lines. These activities were geared not only towards rebuilding and expanding the

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622 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bihać, 3 May 1949, 1; Sreski komitet Bihać, 26 May 1949, 1; Ibid., kut. 139, Oblasni komitet KP BiH, Odjeljenje za propagandu i agitaciju, U vezi proslave dana ustanka 27. jula, 8 July 1950, 1.

623 By the time of the twentieth anniversary of the insurgency in 1961, at least fifteen such holidays were to be celebrated in the Bihać region. For a complete list, see Ibid., kut. 199, Program proslave 20-to godišnjice Ustanka naroda Jugoslavije na području opštine Bihać, 9 February 1961, 2-4.

624 See, for example, AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 196, Opštinski odbor Saveza boraca Bihać, Pripreme proslave 4. jula “Dan borca,” prepremanje i polaganje vijenaca na grobove palih boraca i žrtve fašističkog terora, 17 June 1956. See also Krajina, “Svećano je proslavljen ’4. juli’ Dan borca,” 27 July 1956, 1.

existing infrastructure; they were also designed as an important means of encouraging people of different nationalities to engage with one another and work together towards common objectives which would benefit them all.

Perhaps a more important element in the cultivation of “Brotherhood and Unity” than celebrations, commemorations, and work actions, was the Communist regime’s surveillance of existing national relations. This surveillance was not merely carried out in order to accumulate information; it was conducted as a first step towards determining methods for molding the population’s behavior in line with the regime’s desire for actual “Brotherhood and Unity.”

In the early years after the war, local organs of the Communist Party, including those in the Bihać and Kulen Vakuf regions, were instructed to amass information for the Central Committee on the state of national relations among their local populations. The main questions to be answered were whether or not “Brotherhood and Unity” existed, or was coming into existence, in a given locality, and, if not, then who were the individuals, groups, or “elements” standing in its way.

This regular information gathering on the state of national relations in the localities remained a

626 Ibid., kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bihać, 3 May 1949, 1; Sreski komitet Bihać, 11 May 1949, 1; Sreski komitet Bihać, 14 May 1949, 1; Sreski komitet Bosanski Petrovac, 20 May 1949, 1.

627 This conception of the Communist regime’s understanding of surveillance is based on the analysis of scores of documents produced by various organs of the League of Communists on the state of national relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1945 and the late 1960s. Theoretically, the most important work informing the conception of surveillance used here is Peter Holquist, “Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Modern History* 69, 3 (1997): 415-450.

628 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 175, Izvještaj za mjesec decembar 1947. godine o radu i stanju na terenu sreza Bosanski Petrovac, 29 December 1947, 2; Ibid., kut. 294, Razni izvještaji, Stanje po okruzima: Okrug Bihać, Političko stanje, 1948, 1.
priority for the organs of the League of Communists in the Bihać region, as well as for those throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the first decades after the war.\footnote{For examples from the wider Bihać region during the 1950s, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza o djelovanju klera na srezu bihačkom, 20 April 1952, 1. Ibid., Političko stanje i rad masovnih organizacija na terenu sreza Bihać, 1952, 7-8; ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 56, O nekim negativnim pojavama u partiskim organizacijama, 1952, 11; Ibid., kut. 6N-103, Iz informacije Sreskog komiteta Bihać o radu osnovnih organizacija i nekim negativnim pojavama, 13 June 1953, p. 2; Ibid., Iz izvještaja Sreskog komiteta SK Bihać, 25 December 1953, 3; AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 144, Materijali sa opštinske konferencije, 4 August 1955, 5; Ibid., kut. 148, Zapisnik sa sastanka Sekretarijata Sreskog komiteta Saveza komunista BiH Bihać, 6 June 1956, 11; Ibid., Sastanak Sreskog komiteta Saveza komunista u Bihaću, 1956, 5; Ibid., kut. 159, Referat koji je podnesen na III Plenumu CK SK BiH, 20 June 1957, 19-23.} A report that the League of Communists produced on the state of national relations in the Kulen Vakuf region in December 1958 was paradigmatic of this approach of accumulating information in order to better design policies to cultivate and police “Brotherhood and Unity.” The municipal committee of the League of Communists had its activists keep a watchful eye on the predominately Serbian and Muslim population of the region. They discovered the existence of “chauvinism” in individual—not mass—acts against other individuals or, in some cases, directed towards all those of a different nationality. The following examples illustrate what the League of Communists considered to be “chauvinistic” behavior. The Muslim Omer Kulenović apparently referred to Kulen Vakuf as having been “Turkish” until 1918, but that from then on it had fallen into Serb hands, referring here, and criticizing, the dominance of the Serbian monarchy during the interwar period, and the dominance of Serbs in the Partisan Movement during the war and in the Communist Party after 1945. On at least one occasion the Serb Nikola Filipović was reported to have shouted at all the Muslims who were sitting in his tavern in Kulen Vakuf: “You are all Ustashas!” And at a gathering organized by the Serbian Orthodox Church in the village of Mali Cvjetnić, Miloš
Knežević was said to have yelled out to the crowd: “Here are the Serbs of Cvjetnić! Where are the Turks of Vakuf!? Fuck their Turkish mothers!” The report contained a number of other similar examples of behavior that the League of Communists viewed as “chauvinism,” that is, acts construed as threatening in some way to individuals of a different nationality, and thus damaging to the cultivation of “Brotherhood and Unity” between Serbs and Muslims in the region.630

Having gathered this information, the League of Communists then dealt with the individuals in question. It instructed the Socialist Association of Working People [Socijalistički savez radnog naroda], a large socio-political organization to which most citizens belonged, to organize a series of a public meetings for all the residents in the Kulen Vakuf municipality on the following subject: “Some chauvinist expressions in our municipality and the work of the organization of the Socialist Association on this question.”631 Prior to the meetings members of the League of Communists called each of the offending individuals in for conversations about their acts of chauvinism. Most apparently apologized for what they had said. But the offenders were told that apologizing to members of the League of Communists was not enough to rectify the damage of their comments; they would have to attend the upcoming public meetings and apologize to the entire community. Most stood up at the meetings and apologized,

630 Ibid., kut. 161, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Informacija o oblicima ispoljavanja šovinizma na opštini Kulen Vakuf, 28 December 1958, 1-3.

expressing regret for their offensive comments. How sincere their apologies were remains unknown. A few, after having apologized in private to members of the League of Communists, refused to do so at the meetings.\textsuperscript{632}

This gathering of information on the state of national relations, and the subsequent use of the findings to better police relations between Serbs and Muslims, reflected the essential purpose of the surveillance which the League of Communists employed in its attempts to cultivate “Brotherhood and Unity.” Local committees of the League of Communists throughout the wider region in which the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was located engaged in similar types of surveillance, and often organized identical public meetings as means of policing national relations.\textsuperscript{633} These meetings were a forum for the League to communicate to the local population that “chauvinistic behavior” would not be tolerated. Such meetings were also a place where the League demonstrated that it was ready to take energetic measures to deal with anyone who would insult his or her neighbors on the basis of nationality. These methods provided the predominately Serb and Muslim population of the Kulen Vakuf region with a powerful incentive to get along, at least on the surface, irrespective of whatever their real feelings may have been. People knew that members of the League of Communists were watching them, and they knew that they would be reprimanded if they acted in some way that was damaging to the

\textsuperscript{632} Ibid., kut. 161, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, Informacija o oblicima ispoljavanja šovinizma na opštini Kulen Vakuf, 28 December 1958, 1-3.

\textsuperscript{633} For examples from the wider region in which the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was located, see Ibid., kut. 164, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području opštine Velike Kladuše, 26 December 1958, 1-2; Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području opštine Bužim, 26 December 1958, 1-2; Informacije Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosanska Krupa, Predmet: Pohijje šovinizma, 28 December 1958, 1-2; Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na terenu bihačke opštine u 1958 godini, 30 December 1958, 1-2; Informacije o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu Bosanski Petrovac, 1958, 1; kut. 165, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području sreza Bihać, 31 December 1958, 1-2.
“Brotherhood and Unity” between Serbs and Muslims—either through private conversations with League members or the local police, or by being exposed at public meetings and forced to apologize to all of their neighbors.

As a result of the surveillance and disciplining of so-called “chauvinistic elements,” the Communist regime appears to have been relatively successful in fashioning at least a veneer of positive national relations between a majority of Serbs and Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region during the initial years after the war.634 Over time, what may have initially been a veneer seems to have slowly transformed among many into sentiments and behaviors that were more far reaching. For example, the constant efforts at promoting and protecting “Brotherhood and Unity” resulted in some people increasingly paying less attention to a person’s nationality, at least at the level of everyday interaction.635 This was particularly evident among children who came of age after the war. Ale Galijašević, who was two years old when the insurgents murdered his mother in the September massacres, remembered that for a long time he did not know that Serbs lived in the nearby town of Donji Lapac. Since the town was located in Croatia he simply assumed all of its inhabitants were Croats. Apparently no one had considered it important to tell him that most of the town’s residents were Serbs, and it had never occurred to him to ask about their nationality. The issue, he remembered, was simply not relevant. Such a story illustrates the degree to which some people spoke less and less about nationality after the war.636 This was most likely a result of the regime’s

634 Interview with Adem Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Klisa; Mehmed Štrkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

635 Interview with Maho Vazović on 24 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

636 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
constant efforts at policing negative comments which individuals would make about nationality. One important effect of this policing was a general decline in all public talk about nationality.

Further illustrating this overall decline in interest and talk about nationality was the reaction to the handful of mixed marriages which took place in Kulen Vakuf during the 1960s and 1970s. One such marriage was between a Serb woman from a nearby village whose father the Ustasahas had murdered in 1941, and a Muslim man from Kulen Vakuf whose father the insurgents had murdered during the September massacres.637 Another was between a Serb woman from Knin (located in Croatia) and a Muslim man from Kulen Vakuf whose grandfather the insurgents had murdered at Golubnjača.638 Such cases demonstrated that for some people the losses they had suffered during the war did not prevent them from choosing a spouse of the same nationality as those who had murdered one of their relatives in 1941. While not widespread, the existence of such mixed marriages, especially among those who had suffered during the war at the hands of those of different nationalities, further suggests a decline in the overall importance of nationality in everyday affairs after the war. It appears that in general people did not make negative comments in public about these mixed marriages.639 When one of the

637 Interview with anonymous informant on 10 October 2008.

638 Interview with Nataša Kadić on September 22, 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

639 A small number of individuals apparently had negative feelings about such marriages. Some Serbs in the village of Stjenjani, located not far from Kulen Vakuf, were reportedly opposed to the marriage of a Serb school teacher to a Muslim man. In another instance, it appears that several Muslims were opposed to the marriage of a Muslim woman to a Serb man. They were reported to have asked: “Why couldn’t she find a better husband than a Vlah (a derogatory word for Serb)?” However, it appears that such comments were the exception rather than the norm. See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 184, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih, i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervativizma u današnjim uslovima, Bihać, 3 June 1961, 12. The League of Communists noted that a small number of individuals in Kulen Vakuf were opposed to mixed marriages, but that a much larger number of people were against those who held such views. See Ibid., kut. 217, Uloga društveno-političkih
Serb women married to a Muslim man decided to send her son to the mosque to learn about Islam, a Muslim school teacher questioned her as to why she decided to do this. But her decision for her son to receive Islamic instruction ultimately did not result in any resistance or negative comments from Muslims in Kulen Vakuf.\textsuperscript{640} It appears that the local authorities strongly supported the existence of these mixed marriages. After all, such unions provided them with living proof of “Brotherhood and Unity.”\textsuperscript{641}

Over time, it seems that a majority of citizens became aware of the importance that the authorities placed on “respecting multi-nationality and brotherly co-existence.”\textsuperscript{642} Many, especially children who came of age after the war, appear to have eventually internalized the imperative to protect the “Brotherhood and Unity” of Serbs and Muslims.\textsuperscript{643} This also appears to have been a contributing factor to the general decline in postwar public talk about nationality. National relations in the Kulen Vakuf region thus tended to appear relatively positive between a majority of Serbs and Muslim in large part

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\textsuperscript{640} Interview with Nataša Kadić on 22 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

\textsuperscript{641} On the growth of mixed marriages during the late 1950s in the Bosnian Krajina region (in which the Kulen Vakuf region was located), see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 169, Zapisnik sa savjetovanja članova sekretarijata Sreskih komiteta, nekih članova Sreskog komiteta, sekretara opštinskih komiteta Saveza komunista i predsjednika NOO-e sa terena srezova Banja Luke, Prijedora i Bihaća, 14 September 1959, 13

\textsuperscript{642} Ibid., kut. 217, Uloga društveno-političkih organizacija u razvijanju bratstva i jedinstva na području komune Bihać, May 1964, 18. In other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it appears that some members the clergy were those who were most opposed to mixed marriages. See Ibid., kut. 159, Referat koji je podnesen na III Plenumu CK SK BiH, 20 June 1957, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{643} Ibid., kut. 169, Zapisnik sa savjetovanja članova sekretarijata Sreskih komiteta, nekih članova Sreskog komiteta, sekretara opštinskih komiteta Saveza komunista i predsjednika NOO-e sa terena srezova Banja Luke, Prijedora i Bihaća, 14 September 1959, 1; Interview with Bećo Pehlivanović on 3 October 2008 in Bihać; Nataša Kadić on 22 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
because the authorities rigorously promoted such relations, and disciplined those who threatened them.644

In cases in which individuals who insulted others on the basis of nationality chose not to apologize at public meetings, or in cases in which the offenses were considered damaging enough that a public apology would not suffice, the League of Communists employed other methods. Members of the League had no qualms about instructing the local police and courts to intervene and arrest, prosecute, and punish the offenders in some way, usually through expulsion from socio-political organizations, fines, or imprisonment. Three examples from the 1950s in the Kulen Vakuf region illustrate what kinds of cases elicited these responses. In 1950 or 1951, a Muslim from Klisa was passing through a nearby Serbian village when he saw his mother’s chicken coop next to a Serbian house. The insurgents had murdered her in the September massacres, and the owner of this house had obviously stolen the chicken coop during the plunder of the Muslim villages. The Muslim man demanded that the Serb return his mother’s property. The Serb refused, yelling out: “Fuck your Turkish mother!” Several days later, the Muslim saw this same man passing through Klisa and yelled out to him: “Fuck your Serb mother!” The Serb went immediately to notify the local police, who then came and arrested the Muslim. He was apparently jailed for some time for his chauvinistic attack.645

This instance not only reveals how quickly the authorities would respond to accusations of behavior that endangered national relations; it also suggests that Serbs who

644 Interview with Svetozar Tankosić on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod; Dimitar Reljić on 10 October 2008 in Martin Brod.

645 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.
participated in the stealing of Muslim property during the war occupied a protected position when it came to being held accountable for their wartime acts, as well as their for post-war verbal attacks against Muslims. In this case what was striking was that the Muslim did not first go to the police to either report the stolen chicken coop or the verbal assault which the Serb had subjected him to. This was most likely the case because of the overall perception among Muslims that it was dangerous to accuse a Serb for any crime related to the September massacres. In this instance, the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley correctly saw the policing of “Brotherhood and Unity” as conducted at their expense.  

Some members of the League of Communists had foreshadowed the rationale for this unequal treatment during a meeting in 1952. Several attempted to defend the existence of “chauvinistic acts” among some Serb members of the League, and to justify the discrimination which others, who had not been Partisans, were forced to endure, in the following statement: “Since people did not participate equally in the war, then all things cannot be looked at equally now.”

However much this bias against Muslims in the Ljutoč valley existed, documents indicate that in certain situations the local authorities were indeed capable of taking action against Serbs who insulted their Muslim neighbors. In January of 1957, Milka

646 Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Kisa; Adem Dervišević on 6 October 2008 in Klisa; Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

647 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 56, O nekim negativnim pojavama u partiskim organizacijama, 1952, 11. What an individual did during the war continued throughout the 1950s to be a crucial yardstick that would determine what was possible in postwar life for that individual, as well as for his or her children. For example, permission to join the League of Communists often turned on whether or not a parent of a prospective candidate had been an Ustasha or Chetnik during the war, or was perceived to have been related in some way to an Ustasha or Chetnik. On this point, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 169, Zapisnik sa savjetovanja članova sekretarijata Sreskih komiteta, nekih članova Sreskog komiteta, sekretara opštinskih komiteta Saveza komunista i predsjednika NOO-e sa terena sрезova Banja Luke, Prijedora i Bihaća, 14 September 1959, 4.
Grubiša, a female Serb member of the regional committee of the League of Communists from the municipality of Kulen Vakuf, got into a “chauvinistic fight” with a Muslim school teacher. The incident was severe enough that those present called the local police to intervene. When the police officers arrived, who appear to have been Muslims, Grubiša then insulted them as well. The regional committee of the League of Communists in Bihać, to which Grubiša belonged, recommended that she be expelled from the organization because of this incident, as well as for a number of other instances in which her behavior was considered to be unacceptable for a member of the League.648

In 1958, a Serb named Branko Altagić tried to persuade a group of Serbs from the village of Prkosi (located in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf) to leave their municipality and join a future municipality of Vrtoče by saying that they would have a store in their village. They responded by saying they already had one. It happened to be run by the trading firm “Ostrovica,” which was based in Kulen Vakuf and run by Muslims. The firm also employed a mostly Muslim workforce. Altagić exploded in anger, yelling out to the other Serbs: “The store in Prkosi is Ustasha! We Serbs from Vrtoče liberated you Serbs in Prkosi and Oraško Brdo from the Ustashes whose municipality you now love belonging to. The time will come again when they will slaughter you, and so let them slaughter you….we won’t defend you from them.”649 The Ministry of Internal Affairs recommended that he be formally prosecuted and punished for this chauvinistic verbal assault.650


650 Ibid.
These incidents make clear that, despite what appears to have been a bias against Muslims, the local authorities were willing, in certain situations, to take swift and decisive measures to discipline Serbs who attacked Muslims. This policing of “Brotherhood and Unity,” however unequal it may have been, was a task that consumed a significant amount of the attention of the police in the wider region, and throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the Bihać region during 1961, the regional organ of Secretariat of Internal Affairs (Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova, [SUP]), the main police organ in the region, prosecuted 110 cases against individuals who acted in ways which were considered to be “chauvinistic,” and thus damaging to “Brotherhood and Unity.”\textsuperscript{651} The number of individuals arrested and warned but ultimately not prosecuted was likely much higher. Throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number of individuals whom the authorities disciplined for “chauvinism” numbered in the thousands during the same period. For example, between January 1958 and September 1961, local police counted 329 serious physical altercations which started because of chauvinistic comments. More than 2,500 individuals were reported to have been involved in these incidents.\textsuperscript{652} From late 1959 or early 1960 until around halfway through 1962, 7,433 individual acts of chauvinism were reported across the republic, the equivalent of around eight incidents per day—every day—during a two

\textsuperscript{651} Ibid., kut. 187, Šovinistički istupci i tuče u 1961. godini, 1961 (this document contains no information about what organ was responsible for its production, but its style and form suggests that it was created by either the Secretariat of Internal Affairs [SUP] or UDBA).

\textsuperscript{652} On prosecutions of individuals for chauvinistic behavior from other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9, Neke pojave i problemi u međunacionalnim i vjerskim odnosima u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1959, 57; kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljske aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 66.
and a half year period. It is not clear if the police formally charged and prosecuted all the offending individuals, although the existence of such precise statistical information strongly suggests the involvement of the police in some way, which makes the probability of some kind of punishment likely.\textsuperscript{653}

The high numbers of reported incidents illustrate the importance that the Communist regime placed on rigorously policing national relations. The involvement of the police and the courts in responding to behaviors which the regime viewed as damaging to “Brotherhood and Unity” were crucial elements in communicating to the population the overarching importance of maintaining positive national relations. Many people may have harbored less than rosy feelings about their neighbors of different nationalities for various reasons, most especially because of the recent war in which many had committed acts of mass killing, or had suffered in some way due to such acts. But if they wavered in their support of “Brotherhood and Unity,” the readiness of the regime to forcibly police and cultivate positive national relations provided most with a compelling incentive to get along in their everyday affairs.

Although it is impossible to determine a precise percentage, interviews with local residents suggest that those who came to espouse “Brotherhood and Unity” in their daily lives constituted a majority of the population in the Kulen Vakuf region during the first decades after the war. They did so, it seems, either as a result of the policing which the

\textsuperscript{653} Ibid., kut. 37, Aktuelni problemi u oblasti međunarodnih odnosa, November 1962, 22. The available data on the number of violations, arrests and prosecutions for the decade of the 1960s is incomplete. However, the available documentation suggests that the police remained busy throughout the decade in the task of policing “Brotherhood and Unity.” For example, during the first eight months of 1969, there were 220 criminal charges and around 1,600 more minor violations for chauvinism, nationalism and acts made against the Communist leadership. On these numbers, see Ibid., kut. bez broja, Razni napisi koji se odnose na neke aktuelne probleme nacionalnih odnosa u Jugoslaviji, 1969, Podaci Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova, 1968.
Communist regime carried out, and the propaganda which its activists preached, or out of genuine friendships across the lines of nationality, which were often rooted in wartime acts of rescue. There were, however, a relatively small number of individuals who held negative views of those of other nationalities, views which it seemed no amount of policing or propaganda could alter. The evidence suggests that the attitudes of many such individuals were rooted in the mass killings of 1941. Some members of the clergy were among those who were most active in spreading their negative views. Father Branislav Branić, an Orthodox priest from the Kulen Vakuf region, was known for referring to Muslims as “dogs.” Alluding to the fact that some Muslims had been Ustashas during the war, he warned Serbs to protect themselves from their Muslims neighbors by saying, “the dog that bit you last year will bite you again this year.”\textsuperscript{654} A few members of the Muslim clergy in the wider Bihać region were reported to have been engaging in “chauvinistic acts” by calling some state-sanctioned holidays “Vlah holidays” (“Vlah” being a derogatory word for Serb). A few were also warning Muslims that they were in danger from former Serb Partisans whom they sometimes referred to as “Chetnik-Communists.”\textsuperscript{655} Such a characterization portrayed Serbian Partisans and Chetniks as having been equal participants in the massacres of Muslims during the war.

These types of examples suggest that wartime events were key elements in contributing to the negative attitudes about Muslims and Serbs which some members of both the Orthodox and Islamic clergies held after the war.

\textsuperscript{654} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Analiza o djelovanju klera na srezu bihačkom, 20 April 1952, 1. The Orthodox priest Dragoljub Jovanović from the Bosanski Petrovac region was also apparently making anti-Muslim comments around the same time. On his acts, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 6N-103, Iz izvještaja Sreskog komiteta SK Bihać, 25 December 1953, 3.

\textsuperscript{655} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Političko stanje i rad masovnih organizacija na terenu sreza Bihać, 1952, 7-8.
Those in the vanguard of promoting “Brotherhood and Unity,” that is, members of the League of Communists, were not immune to holding negative views about their neighbors of different nationalities. During the mid 1950s, a number of Serbs from the village of Martin Brod, who were members of the League of Communists in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf, expressed the desire to remove their village from the municipality and attach it to that of Drvar, a nearly one hundred percent Serbian region. Their underlying reason appears to have been the desire to no longer have their village belong to a municipality which some viewed as an “Ustasha place.” A number of Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region, including a handful of members of the League of Communists, were noted during 1958 as referring to all the Muslims in the area as Ustashas; some, especially after drinking, would simply refer to the Muslims as “Turks” and curse their “Turkish mothers.” Using this type of offensive language, which conjured up feelings and memories from the war, held the potential to ignite fights between Serbs and Muslims, among whom members of the League of Communists could sometimes be found, either as participants or instigators. On one such occasion in the wider Bihać region during 1958, an active major in the Yugoslav People’s Army drank heavily in a hotel with a number of other Serbs. Then, at one moment, he turned towards a Muslim sitting nearby and yelled out to him that he was an Ustasha. The Muslim and the others he was sitting with shouted back to the major that he and his Serb company

656 On the involvement of some members of the League of Communists in chauvinistic incidents in the wider Bihać region, see Ibid., kut. 169, Razni materijali vezani za rad Sreskog komiteta SKJ Bihać, 20 March 1959, 8.

657 Ibid., kut. 144, Zapisnik sa zajedničkog sastanka opštinskog komiteta Kulen Vakuf i Martin Brod, 4 August 1955, 1; Ibid., Materijali sa opštinskog konferencije, 4 August 1955, 5.

were Chetniks. Both men then stood up and faced off against each other, with the major
drawing his pistol. Around twenty Serbs gathered around the major, and sixty to seventy
Muslims assembled opposite them. They all prepared to fight. Some pulled out knives,
while others picked up chairs. At the last moment, one Muslim Partisan was able to calm
the Serbs down, and a mass brawl was avoided.\textsuperscript{659} Such instances indicate how wartime
experiences and categories continued to exert a strong influence on some individuals after
the war, even among some members of the League of Communists. Despite their
mandate to promote “Brotherhood and Unity,” the evidence demonstrates that some
continued to hold negative views about their neighbors of different nationalities.\textsuperscript{660}

Similar instances occurred in other parts of the wider Bihać region during the late
1950s and early 1960s which attest to the persistence of wartime categories and
experiences in forming the negative views which some Serbs, Muslims, and Croats had
of each other. In the early 1960s, a group of Serb youth crept into a Croatian village one
night and began singing Serbian songs and yelling out to the Croats: “Fuck your Ustasha
mothers!” Their Croat counterparts came out of their houses to confront them, and then a
brawl started in which thirty to forty people eventually participated. In a report about the
incident, the League of Communists identified the legacy of the war as a direct cause,
noting that many of the parents of the Croat youth involved in the fight had been

\textsuperscript{659} Ibid., kut. 164, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području opštine Velike Kladuše, 26
December 1958, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{660} The Central Committe of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina noted in a classified
1959 report on national relations throughout the republic that some members of the organization were
guilty of holding very negative views of members of other nationalities, which were often based in wartime
events. See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9. Neke pojava i problemi u međunacionalnim i vjerskim
odnosima u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1959, 31.
Ustashas who had murdered the parents of the Serb youth in 1941. In the village of Jelovac, a similar incident took place when a fight broke out between a handful of Serbs and Muslims. One of the Serbs yelled, “All the Turks needed to be slaughtered!” making reference, it seemed, to events from the war. At one point the two groups stood on opposite sides of a stream, with each shouting that they would slaughter the other if they caught them alive, and that they would burn down each other’s villages. On other occasions, physical altercations did not occur, but the presence of the war as a key factor in the perceptions of one’s neighbors was clearly evident. In the Bihać region, some Serbs were known for criticizing the installation of electricity, and the construction of water and sewage systems in Muslim villages and towns, arguing that these areas did not deserve such infrastructure since they were “Ustasha places.”

The presence of the war as a key factor in shaping negative national relations among some individuals could often be seen in taverns. In Kulen Vakuf during the early

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661 Ibid., kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu Bihać, 19 October 1962, 6. Similar incidents occurred in other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, during 1962 in the municipality of Duvno, a fight started between school children who quickly divided along the lines of nationality. They threw rocks at each other, and shouted out that they would once day avenge their victims from the war. The authorities determined that the incident was connected to a brawl that had occurred the previous year between the parents of the children. That fight was also rooted to some extent in wartime events. See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Aktuelni problemi u oblasti međunacionalnih odnosa, November 1962, 28.

662 Ibid., kut. 164, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području opštine Bužim, 26 December 1958, 1.

663 Ibid., kut. 165, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području sreza Bihać, 31 December 1958, 2. On Serbs criticizing the building of infrastructure in Muslim towns and villages because they saw such areas as „Ustasha places,” see in Ibid., kut. 164, Informacije Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosanska Krupa, Predmet: Pojave šovinizma, 28 December 1958, 1. In other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina Muslims sometimes behaved the same way, and even worse, towards their Serbian neighbors. For example, Muslims from the village of Turija (located in the Tuzla region) cut the power lines so that electricity would no longer flow from their village to a neighboring Serbian village. Muslim members of the local committee of the League of Communists were reported to have participated in this incident. It is not clear what compelled the Muslims to take such measures, but conflicts dating back to the war may have been a contributing factor. On this incident, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Aktuelni problemi u oblasti međunacionalnih odnosa, November 1962, 6.
1960s, reports indicated that Muslim and Serb “chauvinists” could often be found gathered in the many bars and taverns in the town where they would regularly bring up the mass killings of their co-nationals in 1941. Some Muslims were said to be sometimes complaining that no one was ever held responsible for the killing of the large number of innocent Muslims whom the Serb insurgents had murdered.664 It appears that these individuals did not express a desire to take revenge on Serbs for the September massacres.665 The local authorities who relayed such comments to their superiors in Bihać nevertheless interpreted them as a means of “destroying Brotherhood and Unity.”666 Serbs drinking in taverns in other areas in the wider Bihać region were doing much more than merely mentioning the massacres of their co-nationals in 1941; some were reported to be angrily expressing a desire to take revenge on the Muslims who they saw as collectively responsible for the deaths of their relatives and neighbors during the war. As one said in 1961 while drinking in a bar in Ripać: “If I stay alive I will avenge my parents. I’m not rolling up my sleeves for nothing. I pray to God that none of the Turks will say anything to me, because I’ll show them who slaughtered my parents, I’ll fuck their Turkish mothers.”667 In 1963, the League of Communists for the Bihać region indicated that a special problem with regards to “chauvinism” was that certain individuals who lost relatives in the wartime mass killings were expressing a desire to take revenge

664 Ibid., kut. 184, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, Bihać, June 1961, 12; Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 6.

665 Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 1 October 2008 in Klisa.

666 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 184, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, Bihać, June 1961, 12; Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 6.

667 Ibid., Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 6.
for their losses at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{668} For some of those who held negative views of others of a different nationality, it seems that the pain and loss they suffered during the war was perhaps the key element determining their postwar attitudes.

In many other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation was more or less similar. In the Zenica region, there were a number of Serbian and Muslim villages in which residents had overwhelmingly been either Chetniks or Ustashas during the war. The League of Communists noted that conflicts between several individuals in the villages, which were rooted in mutual wartime mass killings, had stretched on into the 1960s.\textsuperscript{669} In the Mostar region in 1962, two sons of a Croat Ustasha murdered a reserve captain of the Yugoslav People’s Army who was Muslim. Their father had been hiding immediately after the war in the hills, and apparently this Muslim, or perhaps one of his relatives, had been among those who had captured and killed him.\textsuperscript{670} In the commune of Lukavac, more than twenty years after the wartime mass killings, a Muslim and Serb got into a fight in a tavern and the Muslim yelled out: “What happened to your father [in 1941] will happen to you…you need to be slaughtered just like your father…your time will come!”\textsuperscript{671} These examples, as well as others from many other parts of the republic, support the claim made in a report which the League of Communists prepared in 1962 on national relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Aside from economic and cultural issues,
the war has left the biggest impact on contemporary national relations.”672 For some, the traumas and losses which they endured because of the war appears to have left them with seemingly unchangeable negative views about their neighbors of different nationalities. This attitude permeated their perception of the past as well as the future. As a former Chetnik in the Kakanj region was reported to have said to his Serbian neighbors in 1961, signaling that a day was bound to come when violence would once again break out among neighbors of different nationalities: “Hold on to your weapons because there will come a time when you will need them.”673

In spite of these instances of negative national relations, it was generally a small group of people who participated in these incidents. Only a minority appears to have hated others because of their nationality, and this hatred was generally rooted in traumatic wartime events. In the Kulen Vakuf region, in the aftermath of the war and mass killings of 1941, national relations appear to have been relatively positive among the majority of the mostly Serb and Muslim population of the area. There were a number of genuine

672 Ibid., Aktuelni problemi u oblasti međunacionalih odnosa u Bosni i Hercegovini, November 1962, 1. For more examples of problems in national relations in various regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina which illustrate how war-time experiences caused some people to hold on to very negative perceptions of their neighbors of different nationalities during the post-war years, see Ibid., Analiza o problemima međunacionalnih odnosa na području živiničke komune, 26 June 1962, 2; Analiza o aktuelnim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa na području opštine Srebrenica, June 1962, 3; Informacija o aktuelnim idejnim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa i uticaja iz inostranstva na opštinama: Livno, Duvno, Kupres i Bugojno, 7 July 1962, 1, 5; Analiza o aktuelnim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa na području sreza Prijedora, 15 July 1962, 2; Analiza o međunacionalnim odnosima na području dobojskog sreza, 21 July 1962, 12-13, 23; Analiza o međunacionalnim odnosima na goraždanskom srezu, July 1962, 9-10; Analiza o nekim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa u srezu Brčko, July 1962, 3-6; Analiza o aktuelnim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa na srezu Banjaluka, 28 July 1962, 10, 14; Analiza o nekim problemima međunacionalnih odnosa na srezu Tuzla, 3 August 1962, 3, 5.

673 Ibid., kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Politička dokumentacija o metodama i formama neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, čeničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 157.
friendships, most of which appear to have had their roots in pre-war trading relationships and wartime acts of rescue. Others got along at the level of everyday interaction perhaps less out of deep friendship and more because of the intensive work which the Communist regime carried out in promoting and policing “Brotherhood and Unity.” A much smaller group of individuals held negative views about their neighbors of different nationalities, views which were frequently rooted in the extreme violence of the war. Very little, it seemed, was capable of changing the feelings of these people.

In between the groups at either end of this spectrum, that is, individuals who held relatively unchanging positive or negative views about their neighbors of different nationalities, there was a third group that could rapidly crystallize and melt away in response to incidents of national conflict, or incidents which were perceived to be about national conflict. This part of the population appears to have been capable of getting along with others of different nationalities in most situations. But when an incident would occur, it seems that significant numbers of people could very quickly “switch tracks” from seemingly good relations to highly suspicious views of individuals of different nationalities, or even entire nationalities. Depending on the situation, some could even quickly go from supporting positive national relations to expressing hatred and calling for revenge along the lines of nationality. These people appear to have had a psychological system which could be thought of as a train traveling on one track, but with the capacity to switch tracks on a moment’s notice to another, and to switch back again when tempers would die down later on. Such individuals may have often supported “Brotherhood and Unity” to some extent on a daily basis when things were calm; however, they could easily switch tracks and begin using whatever associations a
person’s nationality evoked as the central yardstick in determining whether or not an individual posed any danger whenever a threatening incident would take place. The types of incidents which could cause such individuals to “switch tracks” included verbal assaults, physical altercations, and murders, which often occurred because of some kind of link to wartime events. A host of other less severe situations, such as the reconstruction of houses of worship and conflicts over employment, were other triggers that propelled people who seemed to have relatively positive views of their neighbors of different nationalities to suddenly express feelings of anger, frustration and sometimes even hatred on the basis of nationality. The League of Communists for the region of Bihać demonstrated its awareness of this complex, highly changeable dynamic with the following statement in a 1963 report: “Chauvinism remains an actual problem…its danger is latently alive. Every improper gesture or action holds the potential to awaken and start political problems.”

Several examples from the 1950s and 1960s illustrate this “two-track approach” which appears to have been present in a sizable number of people during postwar years. During the late 1950s, the League of Communists did not describe national relations in the wider Bihać region as being particularly negative. But when several Serbs murdered a Muslim who decided to walk through their village one night in the municipality of Bužim, a number of Muslims in the area suddenly dropped whatever illusions they might have had about the Communist regime’s support of “Brotherhood and Unity.” It was not clear if the reason for the murder was rooted in national conflict. Yet some Muslims later commented: “If a Serb had been killed the government would have then killed fifty

674 Ibid., kut. 11, Neki idejno politički organi i organizacije Saveza komunista na selu bihaćkog sreza, September 1963, 12.
Muslims, but if fifty Muslims were killed they wouldn’t even kill a single Serb.”675 This murder not only inflamed tensions between Serbs and Muslims in the region where the killing had occurred; it also revealed an underlying sense among some of the Muslims that the regime was heavily biased against them. The killing exposed how some of the Muslims in the region could quickly interpret such an incident, and the potentially disappointing response of the government, entirely through the lens of national conflict.

A similar incident which occurred in the early 1960s in eastern Bosnia illustrates how this dynamic often had roots in wartime events. A Serb was put on trial for having murdered a Muslim in the Višegrad region. It was not clear whether the killing had a basis in any kind of explicit national conflict. Despite this, the nearly fifty Muslims who came to watch the trial began shouting out at one point towards the accused murderer: “Fuck your Serb-Chetnik mother!” Things got so out of control in the courtroom that at least ten policemen were needed to restore order. After this incident, Muslims in the region were reported to have said that “Čedo (short for Čedomir—the name of the accused Serb) won’t be punished in the way he deserves because he has his Serb friends in the government who are protecting him. If he was Muslim he would have been sentenced to death.”676 The incident demonstrated how murders committed by an individual of one nationality against an individual of another held the potential to quickly trigger memories from the war. The curses in the courtroom against the Serb’s “Chetnik mother” were a reference to the mass killings which Serb Chetniks had committed

675 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 164, Informacija o nekim pojavama šovinizma na području opštine Bužim, 26 December 1958, 2.

676 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Aktuelni problemi u oblasti međunacionalnih odnosa, November 1962, 22-23.
against Muslims in eastern Bosnia during the war. A general perception that the local government was run by Serbs prompted some Muslims to conclude that achieving justice was impossible. All of these reactions had rapidly emerged before it had even been established whether or not national conflict had anything to do with the murder that had occurred. This type of incident demonstrates how fast some people could switch tracks to interpreting their unfolding reality exclusively in terms of national conflict, especially when the incident brought up painful associations from the war.

In other cases, incidents exposed an implicit sense among some people that their neighbors were guilty of causing problems not because of their individual behaviors, but rather because they happened to be of a different nationality. Sometime during 1958 in the Bosanski Petrovac region, in a village located not far from Kulen Vakuf, a Muslim named Salih Hadžić arrived in a drunken state to Branko Rovkić’s house, his Serb neighbor. He invited himself in, and then struck Rovkić for no apparent reason. The investigation by the police did not conclude that hatred for Rovkić because he was a Serb was the reason why Hadžić attacked him. It appears that drunkenness and some kind of ongoing personal dispute between the two men were the main causes of the incident. But Rovkić’s family nevertheless insisted that the incident be treated as an act of national chauvinism, and began spreading rumors in the days that followed that “Muslims” are the cause of all acts of chauvinism.677 In this case, the family’s near instant perception that the fight had to be about chauvinistic hatred was a more important factor in interpreting the incident than whatever facts the police were able to later establish. This type of

677 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihač, kut. 164, Informacije o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu Bosanski Petrovac, 1958, 1. On this incident, see also Ibid, kut. 186, Analiza metoda i formi neprijateljske djelatnosti na području opštine Bosanski Petrovac, 30 May 1961, 7-8.
example illustrates how individuals contributed to producing a dominant interpretation of national conflict, primarily through their after-the-fact interpretive claims, despite evidence to the contrary. The “national” quality of “national conflict” is not intrinsic to a given instance of conflict, even when it occurs between individuals or groups of different nationalities; rather, as the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has argued, it emerges through post-conflict interpretative claims.678 Such fights between individuals of different nationalities held the potential to cause people to switch tracks away from at least tacitly supporting “Brotherhood and Unity” and quickly categorize entire nationalities—rather than individuals—as guilty of “chauvinistic acts.”

Incidents sometimes led people to demand that all members of a given nationality be punished, even though the crime may have had nothing to do with national conflict, and the guilty party may have only been a single individual. Sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s a Muslim boy raped an elderly Serb woman in the village of Bušević, located not far from Kulen Vakuf. The police determined that the boy had not committed the crime on the basis of “chauvinism,” that is, because of hatred for Serbs, but rather for other reasons. Nonetheless, Serbs in the village began to talk about the need to take revenge on “the Muslims” for the incident. In another similar instance in the region, two boys, one Serb and the other Muslim, fought each other, with the Muslim ending up killing the Serb. The reasons for the fight did not appear to have anything to do with national conflict; instead it seemed to have been about a personal dispute between the boys which spiraled out of control. Still, afterwards, local Serbs could be heard for some time speaking about the need to avenge the boy’s death by dealing not only with the

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Muslim boy guilty for the killing, but also with “the Muslims” in the region who they saw as collectively guilty. In similar cases, some Serbs would refuse to speak of the Muslim murderer of one of their own as an individual. In one such case, a Muslim named Haso had killed a Serb boy. The Serbs, however, quickly jumped from saying that “Haso had killed the boy” directly to “the Turks killed him.” Such instances illuminate how incidents which aroused highly emotional responses had the capacity to cause people to switch tracks and begin interpreting the causes of a given incident exclusively through the lens of national conflict. This perspective then framed their calls for revenge along the lines of nationality.

The Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina noted in a 1959 analysis of national relations that it was often small incidents that had the potential to snowball into national conflict, or conflict that people perceived as national. Everyday occurrences could cause people to quickly categorize their neighbors of a different nationality as collectively guilty, which then spiraled out of control. A Muslim’s livestock wandering on to a Serb’s property, or Serb walking through a Muslim village singing a Serbian song—such incidents could provoke Muslims to curse the “Vlah” or “Chetnik” mothers of the Serbs, or the Serbs to curse the “Turkish,” “Ustasha,” or “balijska”681 mothers of the Muslims, all of which were highly offensive to those on the receiving end. These verbal assaults could easily lead to small fights, which in turn

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679 Ibid., kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 3.
680 Ibid., kut. 234, Zapisnik sa zajedničke proširene sjednice Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista i Izvršnog odbora Opštinskog odbora Socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Bosanska Krupa, 3 February 1965, 5.
681 The Bosnian word “balijska” originally referred to a Muslim peasant. However, the word eventually became a derogatory way to refer to Muslims. See Škaljić, Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom jeziku, 118.
could rapidly escalate into mass brawls. On some occasions, entire villages, which generally co-existed in peace, could find themselves facing off against each other after a relatively minor incident sparked a fight between individuals of different nationalities.\textsuperscript{682} The degree to which individuals would align themselves with their co-nationals during and after such incidents was evident when the authorities tried to prosecute the guilty parties in court. More often than not, only Muslim witnesses would appear to help Muslims accused of having participating in such fights, and only Serbs would appear to help Serbs.\textsuperscript{683}

Sometimes incidents of national conflict, or behavior perceived to be “chauvinistic” in some way, did not even need to take place for violence to occur. Rumors were often sufficient. For example, the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina reported with dismay a brawl that occurred between a Serbian and Muslim village during the late 1950s in the Sarajevo region. The cause was a story that quickly circulated among the Serbs that the Muslims had damaged their Orthodox Church and cemetery. An enormous fight ensued. The story however, was false; it had simply been a rumor. The Muslims had done nothing.\textsuperscript{684}

\textsuperscript{682} ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9, Neke pojave i problemi u medunacionalnim i vjerskim odnosima u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1959, 7-9.

\textsuperscript{683} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 186, Metod i forme neprijateljske aktivnosti ustaških, četničkih i mladomuslimanskih elemenata, djelovanje stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, June 1961, 7.

\textsuperscript{684} Ibid., p. 46. In a similar instance in 1964 from the Velika Kladuša region, a Muslim boy herding livestock near an Orthodox cemetery threw a stone and damaged a picture on a gravestone. The family of the deceased was incensed and immediately demanded that the local police arrest the boy for a chauvinistic attack. The family of the boy quickly apologized for his act, but this did not stop the Serb family of the deceased from insisting that the League of Communists treat the incident as a chauvinistic act. Wild rumors then began to circulate among the Serbian villages in the area, such as that Muslims were removing corpses from the cemetery and that they planned to build a new mosque next to the Orthodox Church. Such an instance illustrates how the simple act of a child throwing a stone could quickly escalate into a national conflict, even though the act that triggered the rumors had nothing to do with national conflict. On
In such cases the shadow of wartime events often appeared to be in the background, structuring and giving amplification to the ways in which people interpreted such rumors and actual incidents. In 1961, a Serb worker was killed in a work-related accident on a site in the Bosanski Petrovac region, not far from Kulen Vakuf. It appears that he was crushed under a heavy load of materials which accidentally fell on him. Only Muslim workers had been employed that day as loaders of such materials. Several Serb workers, who the League of Communists later referred to as “greater Serb elements” because they had served time in prison after being found guilty for having been Chetniks during the war, then began to spread rumors that the Muslim workers had intentionally killed the Serb. After hearing this story, the rest of the Serb workers then prepared to engage in a brawl with their Muslim co-workers. The presence of the police averted what would have surely been a serious fight. It appears that the wartime experiences of the Serbs who spread the rumors most likely contributed to conditioning them to have a frame of mind in which they would interpret such an accident through the prism of national conflict.685

A government report compiled on “chauvinistic fights and incidents” in the Bihać region during 1961 confirmed the tendency of certain individuals to quickly give fights, killings, rapes and other incidents of violence a “chauvinistic color.” For these people, it appears that their automatic response was to interpret a given incident as a “chauvinistic attack,” or manifestation of national conflict, simply because the nationality of the victim

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685 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 186, Analiza metoda i formi neprijateljske djelatnosti na području opštine Bosanski Petrovac, 30 May 1961, 8.
and perpetrator was different. The League of Communists noted that the role of wartime experiences among certain individuals in forming this mindset appears to have been a crucial element in their interpretations of such incidents.

The importance of wartime violence in conditioning some people to automatically interpret incidents of postwar violence between individuals of different nationalities as explicit national conflict can be further seen by looking at reactions to incidents of murders which occurred among Serbs and among Muslims. On such occasions it appears that people paid dramatically less attention to the killings. Wild rumors, for the most part, did not circulate about the reason for the murder. People did not invoke events from the war to explain why the killings had taken place, nor did they use their wartime experiences to justify the need for any kind of punishment or revenge to be taken against the guilty parties.

It appears that when the victim and perpetrator were of the same nationality, people saw the incident as tragic, but generally did not feel the need to characterize it as having roots in the war, and did not demand that punishment be extended to all those who were of the same nationality of the perpetrator. This suggests that incidents of violence between individuals of different nationalities, or rumors of such incidents, had a special power to quickly evoke memories of the extreme national conflict of the war. These highly emotional responses, which were rooted in memories of exceptional pain

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687 Ibid., kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu srezu Bihać, 19 October 1962, 1-2.
688 Ibid., kut. 234, Zapisnik sa zajedničke proširene sjednice Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista i Izvršnog odbora Opštinskog odbora Socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Bosanska Krupa, 3 February 1965, 2, 6.
689 Ibid.
and loss during the war, appear to be what led some people to quickly interpret such incidents exclusively through the prism of national conflict. This was most likely the main reason why incidents between individuals of different nationalities engendered a much more highly-charged response than incidents between those of the same nationality.

The reactions that people had to incidents of conflict between individuals of different nationalities, or to rumors about such incidents, provide a window into the two-track psychological system that appears to have existed among a sizable number of people in the aftermath of the war. Through its intensive promotion and policing of “Brotherhood and Unity,” the Communist regime provided most people with powerful incentives to get along, at least at the level of everyday interaction, despite the recent history of mass killing. But incidents of verbal attacks and violence which suggested an element of national conflict, or which were directly rooted in national conflict, held the capacity to rapidly and radically reconfigure the ways in which people interacted with one another. Such incidents could quickly cause people to switch tracks and almost instantly take on negative views of their neighbors of different nationalities. This dynamic suggests that national relations, while for some were always positive and others always negative, were highly fluid for many others. Under most circumstances, such relations were generally calm and peaceful at the level of everyday interaction, even if memories of war-time violence lurked close beneath the surface. However, it appears that this tranquil veneer could be easily punctured by incidents of real and perceived national conflict which were often rooted in, and usually conjured up, painful memories of the war.
Reactions to sites of war remembrance held a special capacity to elicit comments from people against those of different nationalities, which the Communist regime subsequently interpreted as “chauvinism.” Some of these reactions which the local authorities in the Bihać region noted during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and their reactions to them, illustrate this dynamic. But other reactions, which focused on criticizing the regime’s unequal policies of war remembrance, nevertheless resulted in the authorities employing the label of “chauvinism.” This was the case with some Muslims in Kulen Vakuf and the wider region who criticized the absence of monuments for Muslim civilian war victims. This case demonstrates how the regime was capable of using the label of “chauvinism” not only as a means of policing “Brotherhood and Unity,” but also as a way of silencing criticism of what some people saw as unjust war remembrance policies.

In 1959, a number of former Serb Partisans in the Bosanska Krupa region complained about a monument being built for “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror” in Bosanski Otok, a town with a majority Muslim population. Some had commented: “Why is a monument being built there? Who was killed there by fascists when it was an Ustasha place [during the war]?” The local committee of the League of Communists interpreted this comment, which essentially portrayed the mostly Muslim inhabitants of the town as Ustashas, to be an act of chauvinism.\textsuperscript{690} In 1961, a small number of Muslims in the Bihać region, or perhaps only a single Muslim, was reported as having complained about monuments which had been built for Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror” who the Ustashas had murdered. For some undisclosed reason, this group or

\textsuperscript{690} Ibid., kut. 164, Informacije Opštinskog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosanska Krupa, Predmet: Pojave šovinizma, 28 December 1959, 2.
individual felt that such monuments should not be built. The authorities also labeled this comment as a manifestation of chauvinism, which in this case was damaging to Serbs.691

Two other examples from the early 1960s demonstrate the capacity that various sites of war remembrance in the Bihać region had to stir up people’s emotions and act as triggers for them to make comments against their neighbors of different nationalities. During 1961, Serbs in Ripač were reported to be vehemently opposed to the building of a new mosque by their Muslim neighbors. They were apparently prepared to take any and all measures to stop the construction of the mosque, with some even ready to use explosives if need be to destroy what the Muslims had already managed to build. If such radical plans proved impossible to realize, their alternative plan was to build a Serbian Orthodox Church as close as possible to the new mosque.692 Part of the reason for the heated response of the Serbs appears to have been that the act of the Muslims rebuilding their mosque conjured up memories of the Ustasha massacres in the region, in which a number of Muslims from Ripač had apparently participated.693 The local authorities labeled the Serbian opposition to the building of a new mosque chauvinistic activity which threatened the Islamic community. Another incident during the same time period elicited an identical response. Following the unveiling of a monument in the village of


692 Ibid., 8. On Serbian criticism of the building of the mosque in Ripač, see also ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 11, Neki idejno politički organi i organizacije Saveza komunista na selu bihaćkog sreza, September 1963, 11-12.

693 On the Ustasha massacres of Serbs in Ripač during the summer of 1941, see Vukmanović, “Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine,” 124-125. Serb insurgents eventually attacked and overran Ripač in 1941, and then plundered and burned the village to the ground, including the mosque. See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 166, SK SK Bihać, Memoarska građa sa područja Sreza Bihać od 1940-1942 godine, Srez Bihać, stenografske bilješke, prisutni: Enver Redžić, Blanuja Stevan, Stanarević Mirko, Beslač Gojko, Grbić Pero, 9 May 1951, 14.
Perna for “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror,” who happened to be Serbian nationality, Gojko Petrović became drunk and then yelled out at a group of Muslims nearby: “I’ll fuck your Turkish mothers, you are all Ustashas, you’ll remember whose mothers you killed in 1941!” He then began to sing a song that denigrated Muslims and glorified Serbs. The League categorized his behavior as chauvinism since it directly threatened Muslims.694 This was not an isolated incident, as indicated in a 1962 report which the League of Communists produced:

A special form of chauvinistic activity relates to evoking events from the war. This influences the youth and encourages them to hate other nationalities and to engage in chauvinistic activities. This is expressed especially in regions where there were mass slaughters during the war. It is not infrequent that under the influence of such individuals people express desire for revenge for their dearest and most close who were killed during the war. These types of memories are often brought up during the building of monuments for “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror.” Sometimes people mention the names of those who did the killings and then sometimes directly threaten those individuals or members of their families.695

These sorts of examples make clear that the authorities had no qualms about categorizing these sorts of reactions to sites of war remembrance as “chauvinism.” Such comments were unambiguous calls for violent acts—in the cases previously mentioned specifically against Muslims and at least one mosque—and thus were seen as directly threatening to “Brotherhood and Unity.”

Other reactions and comments were not so clear cut, as can be seen in the following example from Kulen Vakuf. In a 1959 report on “chauvinistic fights and incidents” in the Bihać region, the authorities did not indicate that Muslims in Kulen Vakuf were voicing any negative feelings about the monuments which had been built, or were being built in the region, for the Serb victims of the Ustahas. Yet the report did


695 Ibid., kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 5.
note that a number of them were commenting that while these monuments were constructed without any problems, nothing had been built in remembrance of the Muslims who the Serb insurgents had murdered in and around Kulen Vakuf in September 1941. Despite having not expressed any negative feeling towards Serbs, the regional committee of the League of Communists characterized these Muslims as “chauvinists” for having pointed out this inequality in the building of monuments for Serbian and Muslim civilian war victims.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 187, Šovinistički istupi i tuče u 1961 godini, 1961, 9.} The authorities noted that while the greatest number of Muslims with this attitude was to be found in the Kulen Vakuf region, there were others in the wider region who shared these sentiments about the inequality in Communist war remembrance policy. Documents described them as “chauvinistically oriented Muslims.”\footnote{Ibid., kut. 184, Informacija o šovinističkim pojavama na terenu sreza Bihać, 19 October 1962, 5.}

This instance makes clear that the Communist regime employed the category of “chauvinism” towards several ends, not all of which were designed to prevent or discipline those who would attack others on the basis of their nationality. In this case, the underlying purpose in labeling some of the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf and the wider region as “chauvinists” appears to have been to stop public discussion about the inequality of the regime’s war remembrance policy. The charge of “chauvinism” thus did not always imply behavior which was directed against the well-being of an individual or group of a different nationality. Sometimes the Communist regime used it as a way of silencing criticism of what were perceived as unjust and unequal governmental policies, such as its vastly different approach to the remembrance of Muslim and Serb civilian war victims in
the Kulen Vakuf region. As such, it was a mechanism that the regime used in enforcing the silence about the mass killings of Muslims in September 1941.

Events from the war left some individuals deeply convinced of the importance of individual behavior. For some, the fact that neighbors saved neighbors of different nationalities drove home the crucial importance of friendship and neighborliness across national lines. For these individuals, a person’s character and actions, especially during the war—and not his or her nationality—were the fundamental factors that determined whether postwar relations would be positive or negative. At the same time, the pain and loss experienced during the war left others deeply embittered. These individuals appear to have remained locked in a mindset in which national differences were the crucial dividing lines in society, and in which events from the war were of fundamental importance in distinguishing between friends and enemies. A much larger group appears to have been capable of maintaining positive relations with their neighbors of different nationalities, even though some may have harbored prejudices behind closed doors. A crucial element at work in compelling these individuals to get along with others of different nationalities was the Communist regime’s intensive work on promoting and policing “Brotherhood and Unity.” This provided most people with powerful incentives—from commemorations and work actions to verbal warnings and imprisonment—to get along, at least at the level of everyday interaction.

Evidence suggests that many of these individuals could quickly change their views, or “switch tracks,” in the aftermath of incidents which they often automatically, and perhaps even unconsciously, interpreted through the lens of national conflict. This
suggests that using a person’s nationality, and especially whatever memories that category conjured up from the war, as a way of making sense of his or her behavior could be easily triggered in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was especially the case in moments when incidents of violence and conflict would occur, or when rumors about such incidents would circulate, while rapidly fading in importance once the emotions and passions surrounding an incident would subside. “Thinking nationally,” that is, relying on one’s associations about a person’s nationality to make sense of his or her behavior, was thus not a static frame of mind, but rather a fluid perspective, which ebbed and flowed especially in relation to moments of conflict and fear, both real and perceived. What needs to be underscored is that these incidents of conflict between individuals of different nationalities were often not intrinsically based on “national conflict.” Rather, the participants and observers made sense of them with an after-the-fact interpretive framework in which they made such conflicts into national conflicts. The evidence suggests that a crucial element underpinning this interpretive framework was the capacity of conflicts between individuals of different nationalities to conjure up terrible memories of the war. Incidents which triggered these memories and associations appear to have held the capacity to cause people to quickly “switch tracks” from maintaining positive national relations in everyday life to displaying feelings of suspicion, anger and hatred towards neighbors of different nationalities.

Finally, war remembrance policy, while explicitly designed and implemented to help build “Brotherhood and Unity,” sometimes had the paradoxical effect of contributing to incidents of national conflict. The building of war monuments, people’s reaction to their unveiling, the absence of memorials on sites of massacres, and the
reconstruction of houses of worship in areas where mass killings had occurred—all of these elements could trigger reactions and comments which brought back painful memories of wartime national conflict and sometimes highlighted the inequality in postwar remembrance policy. The Communist regime was generally quick to label as “chauvinists” anyone who reacted to sites of war remembrance by threatening others on the basis of their nationality. But the authorities also did not hesitate to apply this label to any individual who might question the inequality of the regime’s official war remembrance policy. This was the case with the some of the Muslims in Kulen Vakuf and the wider region who asked why monuments could be built for Serb “Victims of Fascism,” but not for Muslims who the insurgents had murdered in 1941.

Commemorating the war dead was a central means that the Communist regime employed in its promotion of “Brotherhood and Unity.” However, the reaction of the authorities to the Muslims in Kulen Vakuf demonstrates that silencing any kind of challenge to the Communist regime’s legitimacy ultimately took precedence over the creation of actually existing “Brotherhood and Unity.” The cultivation of equality among nationalities in the sphere of war remembrance would have required the regime to take responsibility for the war crimes of the insurgents who eventually joined the Partisan Movement. The reaction to the question that some of the Muslims in Kulen Vakuf posed illuminated precisely where the Communist regime’s ideal of building “Brotherhood and Unity” ended, and where its imperative of self-preservation was what remained.
Chapter Seven

Moving On: Economics, Politics, and the Persistence of Silence

As national relations, the politics of war remembrance, and the Communist regime’s efforts to manage these complex issues played out during the first two decades after the war, a number of important economic, political, and demographic changes were simultaneously unfolding. The Muslim population of the region, as well as throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, steadily grew and the Communist regime eventually decided to recognize the Muslims as an official nationality on equal terms with Serbs, Croats, and others. More and more Muslims joined the League of Communists, with a number assuming positions of leadership. The economy of the Ljutoč valley underwent a period of sustained growth and this contributed to significant improvements in the development of infrastructure. These structural transformations would ultimately contribute, in part, to reshaping the prospects for, and sharpening resistance to, attempts to publicly remember the September massacres. By the early 1970s, the economic, political, and demographic changes helped to create a context in which three unprecedented efforts were made to build various types of monuments for some of the victims of the September massacres. In all but one instance, those who were officially and unofficially responsible for enforcing the public culture of silence about the mass killings succeeded in shutting down these efforts at remembrance.

Towards the end of the 1940s, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was engaged in confronting the last of the so-called “enemy elements” left over from the war, as well as with the formidable threat of the Soviet Union, which materialized in the aftermath of
Stalin’s expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948. In the Bihać region, however, far away from the country’s main centres of political power, the local authorities were more concerned on an everyday basis with less dramatic problems. For them, the mobilization of the workforce for rebuilding the war-torn region and expanding its productive capacities was paramount. Reports from the localities during the late 1940s were filled less with concerns about international politics and the threat of the Soviet Union, and more with day-to-day worries about the numbers of available workers, the condition of tractors and livestock, wood cutting production, and the organization of “work actions” for reconstruction. Most days, harvesting wheat, gathering hay and wool, and finding ways to encourage the population to pay its taxes overshadowed concerns about the Informbiro’s 1948 resolution against Yugoslavia. A handful of meetings were held in small towns, like Kulen Vakuf, and in their surrounding villages, in order to provide a basic explanation to the local population about the new international political situation. But concerns about economic development retained priority among Party leaders during this time.

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699 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bihać, 1 May 1949, 1; 3 May 1949, 1; 11 May 1949, 1; 14 May 1949, 1; 23 May 1949, 1; 25 May 1949, 1; 28 May 1949, 1.

700 Ibid., Sreski komitet Bihać, 1 June 1949, 1; 3 June 1949, 1; 8 June 1949, 1; 7 June 1949, 1; 10 June 1949, 1; 11 June 1949, 1; 14 June 1949, 1; 16 June 1949, 1; Sreski komitet Bosanski Petrovac, 21 June 1949, 1; kut. 319, Dnevne informacije Sreskog komiteta KP Bihać, Org. instrutorsko odjeljenje, 1 August 1949, 1; 4 August 1949, 1; Sedmednevne informacije o najbitnijim problemima na srezu Bosanski Petrovac, 30 August 1949, 1.

701 On the handful of meetings held where the main purpose was discussion of international politics, including one which took place in Kulen Vakuf, see Ibid., kut. 318, Dnevne informacije Sreskih komiteta, 1949, Sreski komitet Bosanski Petrovac, 28 June 1949, 1.
In Kulen Vakuf, the potential threat from the Soviet Union mattered less to most people than the everyday difficulties they faced living in a town which the insurgents had burnt to the ground in September 1941. Throughout the 1950s, many of the Muslims who returned continued to live in what party members referred to as “ruins.” Aside from the severe shortage of adequate housing, the infrastructure of the town remained in very poor condition throughout most of the decade. Party documents described its tiny health centre as “shameful,” lacking beds, tables, gynecological examination equipment, and nearly all necessary materials to administer first aid. A doctor and dentist visited the town only sporadically. The town’s school, built in 1880 during the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had been heavily damaged during the war, and by the mid 1950s had still not been properly repaired.\(^{702}\) And the old wooden bridge which spanned the rushing waters of the Una was in decrepit and dangerous condition, noted by observers as barely suitable for pedestrian traffic.\(^{703}\) The local committee of the League of Communists indicated in 1953 that all of these factors contributed to an overarching sense among residents that no one cared about them.\(^{704}\) This sentiment was

\(^{702}\) AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 145, Neki problemi u Kulen Vakufu koji se moraju i mogu odmah riješiti, 31 August 1953, 1-3.

\(^{703}\) Ibid. For an report from January 1952 on the poor quality of the bridges in Kulen Vakuf, see Ibid., kut. 140, Sreski narodni odbor Bihać, Uprava za puteve, Izvještaj o izvesnim radovima uprave za puteve, 5 January 1952, 2. The problem of the bridges continued to plague the area throughout the 1950s. For reports on the situation in 1958, see Ibid., kut. 163, Referat sa treće opštinske konferencije Saveza komunista Kulen Vakuf, 5 January 1958, 16. On the desires for a new bridge over the Una, see Krajina, “Šta bi željeli a šta ne bi željeli u novoj godini?” 1 January 1958, 3.

not surprising given that an article published in 1957 in the regional newspaper *Krajina* observed that “no place in our region is as dirty and neglected as Kulen Vakuf.”

The overall condition of Kulen Vakuf’s infrastructure and social welfare services was so poor that it endangered the health of the local population of the town and surrounding villages. Many people were reported to be drinking water from the same sites as their livestock. As a result, nearly ninety percent of the children in the region were said to have contracted intestinal parasites, with dysentery one of the most common illnesses. Facilities for the treatment of such widespread health problems did not exist. The severe lack of adequate medical attention also had a serious impact on childbirth. Between the years 1957 and 1959, the regional health authorities noted that infant mortality in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was a disturbing thirty-seven percent. Such a situation explains why the local authorities were hardly concerned with international politics; instead, they were more worried about taking the necessary steps to secure the basic health and welfare of the population.

Toward this end, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, construction began on a new and much better equipped health centre, as well as a building for veterinary services. There was talk of a finding a permanent doctor to live in the town, although the lack of

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706 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Referat o stanju i problemima kulturno prosvjetnih i zdravstvenih pitanja na terenu sreza Bihać, 1958, 16.

707 The rate of infant mortality was even higher in the municipalities of Velika Kladuša, Cazin, and Bužim, at nearly fifty percent. For a report on the health problems of the region’s population, see Ibid., kut. 175, Narodna Republika Bosna i Hercegovina, Higijenski zavod Bihać, Predmet: Zdravstveno prosvjećivanje, 19 May 1960, 1.
adequate housing made it difficult to attract experts from outside. An exception was Derviš Kurtagić, who grew up in Kulen Vakuf and joined the Partisans during the war. After he finished his studies at the University of Zagreb in veterinary medicine in 1956, he decided to return to his hometown to help his neighbors care for their animals. By 1961, preliminary work began on building power lines between Kulen Vakuf and Vrtoče, which would bring a strong and consistent electric current to the Ljutoč valley. This would replace the improvised hydro-electric power systems that local residents had cobbled together during the early postwar years. By the mid 1950s, the local authorities, with the help of a large number of volunteers, began to repair and reconstruct a number of schools in the Ljutoč valley, as well as several in the surrounding Serbian villages. And like most municipalities in the Bihać region, by the early 1960s, much talk among members of the League of Communists focused on the imperative to improve existing roads in the region, and to construct new ones. All of these activities were geared towards securing the welfare of the population and promoting economic development, which slowly began to happen during the early 1960s.

While this steady improvement in the region’s infrastructure was unfolding, the Communist regime continued publicly to treat the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley, as well as the rest of Yugoslavia’s South Slav Islamic population, as a non-existing entity.

709 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 and 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
712 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 185, Informacija o godišnjim konferencijama u osnovnim organizacijama Saveza komunista na opštini Bihać, 7 March 1961, 2.
Unlike Serbs, Croats and others, Muslims did not have the status as a “nation,” and the regime thus did not acknowledge them as a constituent nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, behind closed doors, local officials constantly referred to “Muslims” as a category in ways that appeared to be very similar to how they depicted Serbs and Croats. The Muslims of the Ljutoč valley, like their counterparts all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as throughout Yugoslavia, thus continued to occupy a strange position throughout the 1950s in the Communist regime’s system of national categorization. They did not exist officially as a “nation” and were obligated to declare themselves as members of other “nations” or as nationally undeclared, or alternatively as “Yugoslav undeclared”; yet the regime still appeared to treat them as something akin to a separate “nation” behind closed doors.

Despite their non-recognition as an official nationality by the Communist regime, during the second half of the 1950s some of the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley began to be more active in reviving their religious life, which was the central aspect of their distinct Muslim identity. Members of the Muslim clergy, known as *hodže*, became more active during this time in Kulen Vakuf, and in the villages of Klisa and Orašac. By 1956-1957, religious services were being conducted every Friday, even though most mosques had not been reconstructed since the war. Services were usually held in private homes. Some Muslim members of the League of Communists in Orašac were said to

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713 Ibid., kut. 161, Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista Kulen Vakuf, Informacija u vezi sa religijom, November 4, 1958, p. 1; Opštinsko komitet Saveza Komunista Bosanski Petrovac, Informacija o problemu religije, 4 November 1958, 1.

714 Ibid., kut. 144, Zapisnik sa izborne konferencije Opštinskog komiteta SKJ Kulen Vakuf, 16 May 1954, 2.

715 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on November 4, 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 in Kulen Vakuf.
be actively participating in the village’s religious life, and several were expelled for doing so. In Klisa, local residents fully supported a hodža whom they had enticed to come to their village from the town of Cazin, despite the fact that most of them were extremely poor and living primarily from donations. The League of Communists was especially dismayed by their devotion to rebuilding their religious life, noting that the residents chose to give their money to support the hodža, while a partially constructed school stood unfinished in the village due to a lack of funds. This forced the children of Klisa to walk five kilometers twice a day in order to attend school in Kulen Vakuf.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, these complaints by some members of the League of Communists did not result in any explicitly repressive measures against the Muslims in Klisa. By this time, Muslims throughout the valley, and especially those in Kulen Vakuf, began to focus more of their attention on rebuilding their mosques. Their increasingly assertive stance was partially a result of the regime’s more conciliatory position towards the country’s religious communities. This stemmed from a belief, which appears to have crystallized during the late 1950s, that opposing the reconstruction of houses of worship that were destroyed or damaged during the war could contribute to a sense of martyrdom among certain groups. This held the potential to bring about accusations by individuals that certain nationalities were guilty for the wartime destruction and damage caused to their religious objects. The Communist regime thus worried that churches or mosques left in poor condition would ultimately cause national

716 Ibid., kut. 144, Zapisnik sa izborne konferencije Opštinskog komiteta SKJ Kulen Vakuf, 16 May 1954, 2.

717 AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 160, Analiza rada i djelovanja vjerskih prestavnika na terenu naših opština, Kulen Vakuf, 6 January 1958, 1. On the criticism by local members of the League of Communists about the decision of the residents of Klisa to support the hodža rather than finish their school, see Ibid., kut. 163, Zapisnik sa treće opštinske konferencije Saveza komunista Kulen Vakuf, 5 January 1958, 5.
tensions and be damaging to harmonious national relations. As a result, official regime resistance to the revival of religious life, and especially to the reconstruction of houses of worship, steadily declined during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Some members of the League of Communists, who were focused on economic development, felt that the steady revival of religious life among the Muslims in the Ljutoč valley had a negative impact on the growth of the region’s economy and infrastructure. They pointed toward those Muslims who chose to give what little they had for the reconstruction of mosques and to support the handful of hodže, instead of the construction of schools and other public buildings. Yet a far more serious problem was the corruption that was rapidly growing and seemingly endemic among sizable numbers of the members of the League of Communists and others involved in economic life in the wider region in which the municipality of Kulen Vakuf was located. An internal report issued by the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1958 demonstrated that corruption was a growing problem throughout the republic. The report indicated that in the previous year 3,629 economic crimes had occurred in which individuals had been prosecuted, with many having been committed by members of the League of

718 In 1960, for example, the League of Communists noted that all the religious communities in the Bihać region were making efforts to rebuild their houses of worship. But the report did not express alarm at this situation, nor did it recommend that any repressive measures be taken. “The majority of the clergy,” the report stated, “are positive.” See Ibid., kut. 174, Narodni odbor sreza Bihać, Komisija za vjerska pitanja, Informacija o stanju vjerskih organizacija na našem srezu, 2 July 1960, 2. On the League’s positive perception of the clergy, see also Ibid., kut. bez broja, Informacija o nekim pitanjima odnosa sa vjerskih zajednicama, Bihać, 3 November 1960, 1; On the need for religious communities to be permitted to rebuild their houses of worship so as to prevent any from cultivating a sense of martyrdom, see Ibid., kut. 180, Informacija o nekim aktuelnim pitanjima iz odnosa organa vlasti i konfesionalnih zajednica, 12 December 1960, 10; ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 2, Aktivnost Saveza komunista na unapređivanju međurepubličkih i medunacionalnih odnosa, November 1967, 7.
Communists. Spending public funds for private use was a frequent violation. Although money was often difficult to obtain for the construction of much needed schools and hospitals, some local economic and political elites had no qualms about spending large sums of public funds on expensive cars for use at their offices and firms. They then often used them for private activities, such as driving to Belgrade to watch soccer matches, or traveling to Dubrovnik with their spouses or others for a vacation by the sea.

The widespread spending of public funds for these so-called “business trips” was also common in the Bihać region, where directors of firms would sometimes travel to Zagreb to buy clothes for themselves and their families, and then stay for several days at the firm’s expense. Some used their influence and connections to collect funds for trips that they never actually took. In other cases, the near-constant spending on such trips was so extensive that it contributed to a handful of firms eventually going bankrupt. The problem of corruption was also widespread among those working in various governmental offices, a number of whom used their positions to steal money and dispense favors to relatives and friends. In Bihać, for example, a director of a bank.

719 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 7, Podaci o nekim negativnim pojavama i djelovanju organizacija Saveza komunista u vezi s tim, 18 February 1958, 47
720 Ibid., 24-27.
723 Ibid., kut. 184, Problemi krivičnih djela iz oblasti privredne i krivičnih djela protiv službene dužnosti na području sreza Bihać, 1961, 4-5; kut. 207, Zapisnik sa IV konferencije Saveza komunista sreza Bihać, 15
arranged, through contacts, for his wife to be employed as an accountant in two different firms at the same time. The woman was a housewife and did not perform either job, but still received salaries from both.\footnote{Ibid., kut. 202, Informacija o krivičnim i drugim prouzakonitim djelima članova SK na području sreza Bihaća, July 1963, 1.} Most people were well aware of such illegal practices and some took it upon themselves to complain to the authorities. In 1966, one man wrote a letter to the regional newspaper \textit{Krajina} and accused a certain individual of stealing materials from his firm, and selling them on the side to pocket the money. This was the only way, the letter writer explained, that the person in question could have built a house worth more than eight times his yearly salary.\footnote{\textit{Krajina}, “Zloupotreba položaj,” 27 August 1966, 2.}

The Central Committee issued an internal report at the end of 1963 which indicated that such types of stealing were common among many members of the League of Communists in the Bihać region. Between 1962 and 1963, more than 300 had been caught and warned for similar types of violations, eighteen of whom were punished in some way by the courts, with eight ultimately losing their status as members of the League.\footnote{AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 191, Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine, Organizaciono-politička komisija, Krivična djela i druge protuzakonite radnje članova Saveza komunista, December 1963, 2.} These numbers were most likely only a small fraction of those who engaged in the stealing of public funds, as the vast majority of them were never caught.\footnote{On the widespread nature of stealing by directors, managers, and officials, many of whom were members of the League of Communists, see ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 37, Organizaciono-politička komisija CK SK BiH, Analiza o raznim vidovima neprijateljske aktivnosti i djelovanja stihije i konzervatizma u današnjim uslovima, November 1961, 93-94, 97, 107; See also, AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 198, Prilog, dijelovi “lažne izjave” i “zakidanje društvene zajednice i zloupotreba položaja,” November 1962, 7-9.}
siphoning off of public funds through such illegal activities almost certainly had a more negative impact on the building of infrastructure in the Ljutoč valley than the generally small amounts of money local Muslims gave for the revival of their religious life. After all, the Central Committee estimated in 1963 that the stealing of public funds throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina by members of the League of Communists and others amounted to nearly one billion dinars per year.\textsuperscript{728} To put this number in perspective, approximately one hundred eighty million dinars was the total sum spent in the Ljutoč valley during the 1950s and early 1960s to renovate or build new schools; to construct a health centre and office for a veterinarian; to repair roads; and to construct new bridges.\textsuperscript{729} With more than five times this amount stolen on a yearly basis, the extent of corruption was indeed vast.

In spite of the widespread problem of stealing public funds, serious economic growth nevertheless did occur in the wider Bihać region, especially during the last years of the 1950s and early 1960s, as did the sizable construction of new infrastructure. The number of workers increased some years by nearly twenty percent annually, with the level of per capita production growing, at times, by over thirty percent. Reports by the regional organ of the League of Communists characterized such numbers as “intensive economic development,” despite criticism that production could have been even higher had the workforce been more skilled, and if more experts were available.\textsuperscript{730} Forestry and

\textsuperscript{728} AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 191, Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine, Organizaciono-politička komisija, Krivična djela i druge protuzakonite radnje članova Saveza komunista, December 1963, 5.

\textsuperscript{729} For the precise amounts spent on these projects, see notes 738-741.

\textsuperscript{730} ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9, Izvještaj Sreskog komiteta o radu organizacija Saveza komunista bihaćkog sreza od II. do III. konferencije, May 1960, 1-2. On the lack of experts in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 161, Informacija u vezi s provođenjem u život pisma Izvršnog komiteta Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Jugoslavije na terenu opštine Kulen

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textile production were the main industries which drove development. The rapid economic growth helped to fuel the widespread construction of infrastructure throughout the region. Schools and roads were built, power lines stretched out to more villages, water systems were constructed, and small health stations and larger hospitals became a more frequent sight. In the Bihać region alone, at times more than ten health stations appeared annually, all of which improved the health of the population.731 The League of Communists noted in 1960 that the rapid economic development and expansion of infrastructure had contributed to a more positive mood among much of the population.732

In the Kulen Vakuf region, these changes were becoming visible by the early 1960s, with improvements made to health stations and plans drawn up for the improvement of the electrical power infrastructure.733 The postwar reconstruction and modernization of the railroad lines between Martin Brod and part of the Ljutoč valley was a crucial engine of economic activity in the region, providing at least thirty men in Kulen Vakuf with work, and contributing more generally to the development of

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731 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 9, Izvještaj Sreskog komiteta o radu organizacija Saveza komunista bihaćkog sreza od II. do III. konferencije, May 1960, 9, 12. See also, AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 196 I, Zapisnik sa sastanka Sekretarijat Sreskog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine Bihać, 13 October 1962, 1.

732 ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 19, Izvještaj grupe Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine o nekim aktuelnim političkim problemima i o radu organizacije Saveza komunista u srezu Bihać, July 1960, 1.

infrastructure. Those who did not find work on the railroad were at least now able to travel more easily to the nearby city of Bihać to find employment. Concurrently, and as a result of economic development brought on by the railroad, a number of small stores began to open during the mid 1950s. Men skilled in carpentry, such as furniture makers, began to sell their crafts and services as demand slowly grew as a result of more people being able to rebuild their homes.

The Thursday market, the traditional meeting ground for the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf and the other villages of the Ljutoć valley with the Serbs from the surrounding hills, became a central economic engine for the slow revival of the town and its region. As had been the case before the war, merchants from as far away as Split on the Dalmatian coast would travel to the market to buy livestock. Serbs from the region sold their animals to them and then bought crafts and other items from Muslims which they needed for life in their villages. All of this economic activity allowed more than a few of the Muslims of Kulen Vakuf to return to their traditional position as merchants and traders. Others relied on the bustling activity of the Thursday market to open bakeries, barber shops, taverns, and stores.

By 1961, the people who lived in the once “dirty and neglected” town of Kulen Vakuf, where most were said to be still living in “ruins,” had begun to revive their town and region. Some signs that things were steadily improving were small, such as when plans were announced for a movie projector, the first ever, to be installed in one of the


735 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

736 Ibid.
new buildings under construction for public meetings and events.  But the increased economic activity played a role in bringing about many other larger transformations, specifically with regards to the region’s infrastructure. By 1962, the school in Kulen Vakuf, as well as those in the rest of the Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley, had been fully repaired from the destruction of the war, and new ones had been built. A new health station was built in Kulen Vakuf between 1959 and 1963, and an office for Derviš Kurtagić, the region’s veterinarian, was constructed in 1959. Several key roads in the immediate Kulen Vakuf were repaired, with most of the work completed by 1962. A new wooden bridge over the Ostrovica River was built between 1946 and 1958, and three years later in 1961 the plans for the electrification of the town became a reality.

It is difficult to determine from the existing documentation the exact source of the investment funds for these projects. Several residents of Kulen Vakuf and the surrounding region, some of whom were active in various capacities during the 1960s, claim that local residents provided most of the money. According to these individuals, this was the only way for any kind of development to take place, as the Serb-dominated


738 The following statistics indicate the sizable investments made in the schools in the Ljutoč valley: in Kulen Vakuf the school was rebuilt in 1948 and then repaired in 1962 at a cost of 60,000,000 dinars; the school in Ćuvkovi was built in 1948 with 15,000,000 dinars; the school in Orašac was rebuilt in 1950 and repaired in 1951 with 30,000,000 dinars; and the school in Klisa was built in 1959 with 20,000,000 dinars. See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 217, Uloga društveno-političkih organizacija u razvijanju bratstva i jedinstva na području komune Bihać, May 1964, 11.

739 The combined investment for both buildings was 30,000,000 dinars. See Ibid., 12.

740 Roads were repaired between Kulen Vakuf and Klisa (four kilometers) at cost of 400,000 dinars; between Kulen Vakuf and Orašac (twelve kilometers) for 800,000 dinars; and between Kulen Vakuf and Ostrovica (four kilometers) for 400,000. See Ibid., 14.

741 The new bridge over the Ostrovica cost 4,000,000 dinars and the electrification of Kulen Vakuf cost 19,500,000 dinars. See Ibid., 14-15.
authorities were generally opposed to assisting the region because they saw it as an “Ustasha place.” This interpretation argues that it was the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley who completely financed the construction of the schools, roads, health stations, and the installation of electricity which improved the region’s infrastructure.742

Some even claim that local Serbs went as far as to attempt to sabotage some of these projects. Veterinarian Derviš Kurtagić remembers that despite paying for the construction of power lines, the Muslims in the region were frequently forced to go without electricity. One excuse from the authorities was that rain, snow or other bad weather would disrupt service. But these outages often occurred when the sun was shining. Kurtagić contends that a Serb named Marko, a former Partisan who believed that Kulen Vakuf was an “Ustasha place,” and one of the men who ran the power transformer in Vrtoče which sent electricity to the town, was the guilty party. He apparently took great pleasure in shutting off the power for days at a time, leaving Kulen Vakuf in darkness at night, and forcing people sit and watch as their food spoiled. Kurtagić claimed to have heard Marko yell out: “Fuck their Turkish mothers! They won’t have electricity!”743

Power outages in the region were a serious problem beginning soon after the installation of electricity in the early 1960s, and they occurred regularly through the

742 Mujo Begić, Ljutočka dolino, nikad ne zaboravi (Bihać: Grafičar, 2004), 32; Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 58; Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

743 Apparently during one six-month period, the power was off in Kulen Vakuf for a total of fifty eight days. Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 49-50.
1980s, as the newspaper *Krajina* reported on several occasions. However, it is not clear what the main reasons for the problems were. The supply of power and the equipment used to deliver it may have been insufficient to meet the growing demand in the region. Some Serbs were indeed opposed to economic development in Kulen Vakuf because of their idea of the area as an “Ustasha place,” and thus the story about Marko is possible to believe. But Jusuf Zjakić, a former secretary of the regional committee of the League of Communists in Bihać, contends that the vast majority of League members, including many Serbs, believed that the most important task for the Kulen Vakuf region during the 1960s was to push for maximum economic development. Some Serbs did view the area as an “Ustasha place,” but it seems that many more League members were committed to helping the region develop its economy and infrastructure as much as possible.

The significant level of investment funds necessary for the various projects—from schools and health stations, to roads and electricity—suggests at least some involvement of the regional authorities in directing resources to the development of the Ljutoč valley. It appears that a combination of funds and volunteer work by local residents, and investment by the authorities from outside the region, was what allowed most projects to be realized. The story of the construction of the new bridge in Kulen Vakuf across the Una is paradigmatic in this regard. By the mid 1960s, nearly everyone in the area was calling for a new bridge to be built to replace the old one which was almost too

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745 Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać.
dangerous to cross even on foot. In 1966, construction began on a new bridge, most of which was carried out by local volunteers. But the vast majority of the funds for the project were given by the Executive Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina [Izvršno vijeće Bosne i Hercegovine], the Yugoslav People’s Army, and the municipality of Bihać. Some local Serbs did view the region as an “Ustasha place,” and some Muslims may have had concrete experiences in which they found that such individuals attempted to stop the development of their region in some way. However, the case of the new bridge suggests that sizable investment by municipal, republican, and federal organs in the development of Kulen Vakuf’s infrastructure did take place.


747 The 5,790 volunteer hours necessary for the bridge to be completed demonstrated the substantial involvement of local residents in the construction project. See Krajina, “Nakon dugog čekanja. Kulen Vakuf dobio most,” 29 October 1966, 1; “Kulen Vakuf svečano proslavio 25-godišnjicu ustanka naroda Jugoslavije. Pušten u saobraćaj novi most preko Une,” 12 November 1966, 1.
By the mid 1960s, despite these investments in the development of infrastructure, and the mass efforts of local residents to construct such projects, the overall economic situation in the Ljutoč valley began to stagnate and then quickly declined. During this time, the sizable number of merchants, especially those from Lika and Dalmatia, who used to come regularly to Kulen Vakuf’s Thursday market, began to find other markets closer to their hometowns to purchase livestock. Concurrently, a number of small stores began to open in several of the Serbian villages in the region, which meant they no longer needed to travel to Kulen Vakuf to purchase many of the items necessary for their homes.
Both groups, who composed the main market for the goods which the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley sold, thus slowly disappeared. The result of these two developments was the gradual death of the market. The Muslims of Kulen Vakuf and the other villages of the Ljutoč valley, who “lived from Thursday to Thursday,” stood ready each week with goods to sell but fewer and fewer people came to buy them. By the late 1960s, the regional newspaper reported that the market was nearly empty. This change was a major blow for those who had opened taverns, barber shops, and host of other stores in Kulen Vakuf, as their market also began to vanish. The entire town, which was accustomed to making more money each Thursday than during the rest of the entire week, soon entered a period of economic decline. The taverns began to fill with local residents who congregated each day to commiserate about their lack of work and money. They often spoke about the need for some kind of factory to be built in their region, which many believed was the only way to save them from the slow death of the Thursday market.

The worsening economic situation left many men with no way to support their families. Like so many others throughout Yugoslavia during the 1960s, they had little choice but to leave the region and seek work elsewhere in the country and abroad. The gradual disappearance of many men began during the early to mid 1960s, when many would leave for seasonal work in the nearby republics of Croatia and Slovenia, and the

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748 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
many construction sites in Belgrade. By the end of the decade, many were traveling much further to find work, often to Austria and Germany, where they usually found employment as physical laborers. They often remained separated from their families for months at a time. This exodus of male workers was widespread throughout the entire Bihać region. It eventually resulted by the early 1970s with around 15,000 workers—every twentieth worker—leaving to find employment in foreign countries.

In the Ljutoč valley, the trains that these men boarded to carry them to their jobs in foreign countries were nicknamed “the trains of tears,” as their departure was always marked with the intense sadness of wives and children saying goodbye to their husbands and fathers. However, the foreign currency that the men sent home was a central economic engine which fueled the development of villages like Orašac and Ćukovi during the 1970s. As Derviš Kurtagić said, “Tito and the Party did not develop these villages; Germany and Austria did.” But the development came with a price. The women these men left behind were forced to deal will unprecedented burdens which usually entailed managing difficult agricultural work and child rearing on their own.

752 Ibid., „Zašto sezonski, a ne stalni radnici,” 25 June 1964, 1; Interview with Derviš Dervišević on 5 and 6 October 2008 in Klisa; Mujo Hasanagić on 4 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.


754 The vast majority of those who left came from rural areas, like the Ljutoč valley, and had low levels of education. Roughly 3,000 were under twenty-five years of age, and 8,000 were between twenty-five and forty. See Krajina, Naši radnici u inostranstvu (II). Svaki dvadeseti zaposlen u inostranstvu,” 28 July 1972, 4.

755 Kurtagić, Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu, 56.

756 Krajina, “Žena krajinskog sela je socijalno naugrožena,” 14 October 1965, 1; ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 11, Neki idejno politički organi i organizacije Saveza komunista na selu bihaćkog sreza, September 1963, 16.
Some of the women began drinking alcohol to cope with the strain, which was previously unheard-of among the Muslim women in the region. A number of marriages fell apart under the stress of the economic situation which required the men to live for months, and in many cases years, as guest workers \textit{[gastarbeiter]} in other countries.\footnote{Kurtagić, \textit{Zapisi o Kulen Vakuflu}, 56.}

As the social problems caused by the economic emigration mounted, and as the economic situation in Kulen Vakuf and the Ljutoč valley continued to remain stagnant, the calls for a factory to be built became louder.\footnote{Krajina, \textit{“Prepolovljeni Kulen Vakuf,”} 11 June 1966, 5.} Around this time, several merchants from Lika began to look seriously at the prospect of opening a textile factory in Kulen Vakuf. For several years these men had employed a number of women in the town to sew various items piecemeal in their homes. The merchants therefore knew there was a good workforce available. Through connections with the regional textile firm \textit{Kombiteks}, these men were able to bring about the construction of a textile factory for children’s clothing in Kulen Vakuf, which was built around a kilometer south of the centre of town on the Bosnian side of the Una River.\footnote{By the late 1970s, \textit{Kombiteks} had become one of the largest textile firms on Bosnia and Herzegovina, with factories in Kulen Vakuf, Cazin, Bosanski Petrovac, and Bosanska Krupa, with a total of 3,100 workers. See in Ibid., \textit{“Povodom dvadeset godina uspjehnog rada i razvoja ‘Komiteksa.’ Na putu izrastanja u giganta,”} 3 June 1977, 3.} As local residents remember, the opening of the “Bebi triko” factory in 1969 saved Kulen Vakuf.\footnote{Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Mehmed Štrkljević on 22 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.} Eventually employing more than three-hundred workers, including large numbers of women, the factory solved a large part of the region’s unemployment problem.\footnote{Ibid., \textit{“Vakufški ‘Bebi’ nadrastao pelene,”} 18 August 1972, 3.} It pulled Kulen Vakuf out the economic
slump in which it had been languishing since the rapid deterioration of the Thursday market during the early to mid 1960s.\textsuperscript{762}

The economic growth triggered by the opening of the factory injected an unprecedented level of dynamism into the everyday life of Kulen Vakuf and its surrounding region. Suddenly there was work for nearly everyone. The taverns and cafes which had previously been full of men complaining about the lack of jobs were now filled by people coming from and on their way to work. The increase in people working meant that once again small stores, taverns, barber shops and, eventually, even a bank, were able to open their doors. The rapid expansion of economic activity in Kulen Vakuf also happened to coincide with, and fuel, significant demographic growth. The children that had survived the war, and the first generation born after it, had begun to marry during the mid to late 1960s. The many children they subsequently gave birth to, which the wide availability of work allowed them to support, added a further element of

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763 Interview with Mehmed Štrkljević on 22 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
pulsating energy to daily life. The streets and schoolyard were often filled with the sounds of hundreds of children playing.\textsuperscript{764} Kulen Vakuf thus finally began during the early 1970s to shake off many of the physical reminders of the war. With the construction of the factory, as well as many new houses and a sizable number of stores, it no longer resembled a town that had been burned to the ground in 1941.\textsuperscript{765} And along with the prosperity which the economic expansion brought, the growth of the population, especially the increasing number of young married couples and their children, made the nightmares of the September massacres seem increasingly remote from everyday life.

\textsuperscript{764} Interview with anonymous informant on 10 October 2008. During the second half of the 1950s, the increase in the number of children was already evident in the growing numbers who were attending school in the municipality of Kulen Vakuf. Statistics from that period, which included Muslim, Serb and Croat children, and which represent the total number of school children for the entire municipality, demonstrate a steady upward trend: 1954-1955: 678; 1955-1956: 782; 1956-1957: 860; 1957-1958: 948. See AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 140, Referat o stanju i problemima kulturno prosvetnih i zdravstvenih pitanja na terenu sreza Bihać, 1958, 1. Between the late 1960s and late 1970s, however, their numbers dramatically increased. For example, in 1968, there were around 600 children attending the school in Kulen Vakuf. By 1978, around 670 were attending the school Orašac. If one adds to this the numbers of school age children from Klisa and Ćukovi, the number would have most likely exceeded 2,000 by the late 1970s, more than double the number from the late 1950s. See Krajina, “Tamo-am po Kulen Vakufu,” 1 March 1968, 4; “Akcijaški nemiri Oraščana—zalog za bolju sutrašnjicu,” 24 February 1978, 7.

\textsuperscript{765} This situation was similar in the other Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley. On the revival of Orašac, for example, see Krajina, “Susret s aktivinistom. U Orašcu komunisti na djelu,” 23 March 1979, 5; Knežević, “Omladinska radna akcija u selu Orašcu,” in Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga IV, 253-255.
During this period, which witnessed the decline and then rise of Kulen Vakuf’s economy, several other political and demographic transformations took place that ultimately enhanced the political position of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Chief among them was the Communist regime’s decision in 1961 to create the category “Muslim in the sense of ethnic belonging” [musliman u smislu etničke pripadnosti], which was used in the census taken that year. This awkward formulation was engineered
in order to allow Muslims who were not religious to be able to declare themselves as members of the new quasi nationality.\textsuperscript{766} Two years later in the new republican constitution of 1963, Muslims received official recognition, along with Serbs and Croats, as one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s three constituent peoples or “nations” \textit{[narodi]}. In effect, with these two changes the regime formally recognized the Muslims as an official category of national identification.\textsuperscript{767}

The precise reasons for the Communist regime’s decision to place the new category of “Muslim” in the 1963 constitution are insufficiently researched and thus remain unclear in the existing historiography.\textsuperscript{768} It appears that during the late 1950s and especially throughout the 1960s, a numbers of elites in the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as Cvijetin Mijatović, Branko Mikulić, Džemal Bijedić, and Hamdija Pozderac, increasingly began to argue in favor of recognizing Muslims as a constituent people or “nation” \textit{[narod]} of the republic.\textsuperscript{769} However, their precise reasons


\textsuperscript{767} The category appeared in 1963 in the statistical tables kept for members of the League of Communists in the municipality of Bihać. See, for example, AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 205, Godišnji statistički izvještaj o članovima SKJ za 1963 godinu, 1963.

\textsuperscript{768} For an introduction to the subject, see Filandra, \textit{Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću}, 231-240; Bojić, \textit{Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka}, 236-237. By the late 1960s, the Central Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared that “the practice of insisting that Muslims declare themselves as either Serbs or Croats was damaging, as it was shown earlier, and today’s socialist practice demonstrates, that the Muslims are a separate nation.” See ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 17, Prijelog zaključaka o idejni-političkim zadacima komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u ostvarivanju ravnopravnosti i razvijanju bratstva i jedinstva naroda Bosne i Hercegovine i naroda i narodnosti jugoslovenske socijalističke zajednice, May 1968, 7. For a vague explanation as to what caused the change, with the main reason based in “the further strengthening of self-managing relations,” see \textit{Krajina}, “Izlaganje Hamdije Pozderca, Sekretar Sekretarijata CK SK BiH na 26. proširenoj sjednici CK SK Bosne i Hercegovine. SK u borbi za dovršenje nacionalne emancipacije, 17 March 1971, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{769} For a brief discussion of the views of political elites on subject of recognizing Muslims as a nationality, as well as on scholarly works produced during the 1960s on the identity of Muslims in Bosnia and
for doing so remain unclear. It seems that Tito gave his support to this group of elites for at least two reasons. First, recognizing the Muslims as “a full-fledged national group,” as Ivo Banac has argued, was a way of countering so-called “deviationist trends” (i.e., manifestations of nationalism) in the republics of Serbia and Croatia. One method would be to strengthen the political periphery of the Yugoslav federation, and recognizing the Muslims was a primary means of achieving this goal. Second, some evidence suggests that Tito’s desire to foster good relations with Arab nations in the Non-Aligned Movement was another critical factor that led him to give support to those political elites who sought official recognition of Muslims as a nationality.

In 1966, the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted an unofficial count of the total number of Muslims in the republic using data from the census of 1961. In this case, a person’s last name—not his or her self-categorization in the 1961 census—was the criteria which the League employed. While never released to the public, the count demonstrated that, already by the early 1960s, the Muslim population of the republic was almost equal to that of the Serb, which was the most numerous according the 1961 census. According to the internal count of 1966, which employed the category “Muslim by origin” [Musliman po porijeklu], a euphemism that counted all the Muslims, including those who still declared themselves as Serbs, Croats,


771 Upon hearing that most Muslims would declare themselves as “Muslims” (in the national sense) in the upcoming 1971 census, Tito apparently remarked during a meeting on 23 January 1969 in Brioni: “For us that’s welcome because we have relations with Arab countries.” On this meeting, see Kamberović, “Stav političke elite o nacionalnom identitu Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini sredinom 1960-ih godina,” 186.
and Yugoslav undeclared in the 1961 census, there were 1,205,075 Muslims. This constituted nearly thirty-seven percent of the population of the republic. They were rapidly closing in on the Serbs, the most numerous nationality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who numbered 1,322,943, or slightly over forty percent of the population.\footnote{ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. bez broja, Razni napisi koji se odnose na neke aktuelne probleme nacionalnih odnosa u Jugoslaviji, 1969, Socijalistička Republika Bosna i Hercegovina, Republički zavod za statistiku, Muslimansko stanovništvo po narodnosti popis 1961, July 20, 1966. On the precise instructions as to how this internal count of “Muslims by origin” was to be carried out, see in Ibid., Socijalistička Republika Bosna i Hercegovina, Republički zavod za statistiku, Objašnjenje za korištenje podataka o stanovništvu SR BiH po nacionalnosti u kojima se kontigent muslimanskog stanovništva prikazuje po porijeklu, a ne po slobodnoj opredjeljenosti, 24 November 1966, 1-2.}

Both of these developments—the Communist regime’s official recognition of the Muslims as a de facto nationality and their demographic expansion to nearly the most numerous group by the early 1960s—hinted at the growing potential of Muslim political relevance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Throughout the 1960s, however, Serbs still tended to remain overrepresented in most of the committees of the League of Communists in the republic, including the regional and municipal committees in the Bihać region. For example, in a 1964 report on the national composition of the League of Communists in the municipality of Bihać, it was shown that Serbs made up 28.3% of the population, but were 50.36% of the membership of the League. Muslims were 55.3% of the population, but composed only 36.26% of League members.\footnote{AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 210, Analiza o stanju političkog kadra na terenu opštine Bihać, October 1964, 3. The municipality of Kulen Vakuf was abolished in 1960 and most of the Muslim villages were attached to the municipality of Bihać. See in Ibid., kut. 177, Zapisnik sa sjednice Sekretarijata Srpskog komiteta Saveza komunista BiH Bihać, 8 February 1960, 1. In a 1959 document that included information on the national composition of the League of Communists in the former municipality of Kulen Vakuf, Serbs were overrepresented. The national composition of the population was 57% Serbs, 2.9% Croats, and 40.1% Muslims. The national composition of the League, however, was 76% Serbs, 2.7% Croats, and 23% Muslims. See, ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. Izvještaj o radu na brojnom jačanju organizacija Saveza komunista na opštinama Bihać, Bosanska Krupa, i Kulen Vakuf, 15 June 1959, 11. See also AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 174, SK SK Bihać, Informacija o kretanju članstva Saveza komunista za 1959. godinu, 28 January 1960, 5.} This overrepresentation of Serbs was
even more pronounced in the wider Bihać region, where they made up 41% of the population, but composed 74% of the membership of the League. Some attempted to explain the discrepancy by pointing out that many Muslims lived in the rural regions where poverty was most acute. As a result, large numbers of young men were forced to emigrate to neighboring republics or go abroad in order to find work. This was the main group most likely to join the League of Communists. But other League members highlighted what they saw as another, far more important reason. In many areas it was apparently an unwritten law that Serbs were to occupy the main leadership positions, regardless of the national composition of the population. And this necessitated them retaining numerical dominance in the League of Communists.

Nevertheless, during this same period, the national composition of most organs of the League in the Bihać region did begin to better reflect the national composition of the population, particularly in the secretariats, the small commissions which led each committee of the League. And the offices of local government, which were often staffed by individuals who were not members of the League, generally came to reflect the national composition of the population. In Kulen Vakuf and the other Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley, this meant that representatives of the majority Muslim population

774 Ibid., Analiza o stanju političkog kadra na području sreza Bihać, 7 December 1964, 5. See also Ibid., kut. 217, Uloga društveno-političkih organizacija u razvijanju bratstva i jedinstva na području komune Bihać, May 1964, 3.

775 Ibid., kut. 210 Analiza o stanju političkog kadra na terenu opštine Bihać, October 1964, 4.

776 Ibid., Analiza o stanju političkog kadra na području sreza Bihać, 7 December 1964, 6.


were increasingly among those with a say in the development of their region. As a newspaper article reported during the late 1970s, most of these local Muslim leaders, as well as many of their neighbors, came to view themselves as a generation engaged in, and largely directing, what appeared at the time as the ceaseless growth and improvement of their region.\footnote{\textit{Krajina}, “Generacija koja neprekidno gradi,” 10 February 1978, 7.}
This mindset was largely a result of the political, demographic, and economic transformations which occurred during the first two and half decades after the end of the war. The Communist regime’s de facto recognition of the Muslims as a nationality equal to Serbs, Croats, and others; the rapid growth of the Muslim population; the significant improvements in the region’s infrastructure; and the economic boom which finally got underway in earnest during the end of the 1960s and early 1970s—all of these factors contributed to a growing sense of confidence among the Muslim population in the region. For many, it seemed that building in the present and for the future was yielding great results. The factory was working, healthcare was available to all, children were being educated in newly-built schools, roads and bridges were constructed, and the cultivating and policing of “Brotherhood and Unity” resulted in relatively harmonious national relations. Many Muslims, both those who were members of the League of Communists
and those who were not, played active roles in all of these transformations. For many of them, thinking about the past, and especially the dark days of the September massacres of 1941, could contribute nothing positive to the task of developing Kulen Vakuf and the rest of the Muslim villages of the Ljutoč valley. As one former Muslim member of the League of Communists in Kulen Vakuf put it when discussing life during the first half of the 1970s: “We were all living in prosperity. So why all of a sudden, thirty years after the war, would we need to touch things from the past?”  

During the first half of the 1970s, however, three individuals—two from Kulen Vakuf and one from Klisa—decided that it was time to “touch things from the past.” Ironically, it may have been the dynamism of the period which contributed to emboldening them to open the politically-sensitive question of remembering the victims of the September massacres. What all three wanted were monuments of some form or another to be built for the victims. In making such proposals, they demonstrated that the Communist position of viewing economic development as the main solution to nearly all problems and disputes had a sizable blind spot: economic growth and the construction of infrastructure, no matter how dynamic and widespread, could not erase the fact that the victims of the September massacres had remained covered in a public veil of silence since 1941.  

780 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.  

781 A document which the League of Communists produced in 1964 entitled “Theses on the Problems of National Relations” illustrates the Communist perspective regarding the importance of economic development as the central solution to most problems, especially in the sphere of national relations: “When there are no longer problems in economic relations, there will no longer be any national problems anywhere in social life. Problems do not arise because of differences in languages and cultures, but because there
Unlike most other towns and villages in the region, no monuments to the “People’s Liberation War,” or for the official victims of “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror,” were built in Kulen Vakuf during the first decade and half after the war. This made the town something of an anomaly not only in the region, but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina where 3,627 monuments to the war and its victims had been constructed already by 1959. A number of smaller and poorer Serbian villages in the region had built monuments by this time, and many more did so throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Given Kulen Vakuf’s economic development and population growth by the early 1970s, it was especially striking that no war monuments had been constructed in the town. Two reasons accounted for this situation. First, a number of Serbs in the region who were members of the League of Communists and SUBNOR did not look favorably at the idea of building war monuments in Kulen Vakuf. For them, the town, as well as the rest of the Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley, was an “Ustasha place.” Even though less than one percent of the Muslim and Croat population of the region had joined the Ustaschas, and more than a few Muslim men who survived the September massacres had gone on to join the Partisans, these Serbs still insisted on exist conflicting national interests in economic relations.” ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. bez broja, Teze o problemima nacionalnih odnosa, 1964, 7.

782 On the absence of monuments in Kulen Vakuf, see AUSK, Fond SK SK BiH Bihać, kut. 173, OK SK BiH Kulen Vakuf, 25 November 1959, 1. On the existence of monuments in many of the other municipalities in the region, see Ibid., Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista BiH Kulen Vakuf, 11 November 1959, 1; Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista BiH Bosanski Petrovac, 23 November 1959, 1; Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista BiH Velika Kladuša, Informacija o podizanju spomenika i drugih spomen objekata, 24 November 1959, 1; Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista BiH Čazin, 27 November 1959, 1; Opštinski komitet Saveza komunista BiH Drvar, Predmet: Analiza o podizanju spomenika i drugih objekata, 1 December 1959, 1; SKJ SK SK BiH Bihać, Predmet: Analiza o podizanju spomenika i drugih spomen objekata, 7 December 1959, 1-2; Spisak spomenika sreza Bihać, 1959.


784 On war monuments in the Serbian villages in the region, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.
attaching this label to the town and its region. There was, therefore, no need to build monuments for “Fallen Fighters” in Kulen Vakuf. As a result, monuments for Partisans in the region were built exclusively in the nearby Serbian villages.

A second reason was rooted in the complex nature of the mass killings of Serbs and Muslims which had taken place during the war. Between June and August 1941, the Ustashas killed large numbers of Serbs in Kulen Vakuf next to the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as near the town’s school and train station. A monument for these “Victims of Fascist Terror” could have been built somewhere in the town. However, constructing a monument for what would have been, in effect, only Serb civilian war victims would have been politically destabilizing. Such a monument would have called attention to Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror” in the same location where Serb insurgents had later murdered large numbers of Muslims. With the postwar population of the town made up overwhelmingly of Muslims, it would have been highly divisive to build a monument for what would have been only Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror” whom the Ustahas had murdered, but not also for Muslims massacred by the insurgents. Yet if the authorities wished to construct a monument that acknowledged the Muslim victims they would have been forced to address the fact that many of those who carried out the killings went on to become Partisans, or they would have needed to characterize the insurgents as “Chetniks.” By the early 1970s, none of these options were politically acceptable. Thus, due to the town’s complex wartime history, the local authorities decided to build no monuments to anyone in Kulen Vakuf.

785 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf. For the numbers and names of the Muslims from Kulen Vakuf and the other Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley who joined the Partisans, see Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 134-137.
These dilemmas among the political leadership of the region did not stop a handful of others from proposing ideas about building monuments. The first attempt took place during the early 1970s. Its initiator was a Muslim who was born in Kulen Vakuf named Džafer Džambegović. He had been among the refugees from the Ljutoč valley who left the town on 6 September 1941 fleeing the insurgents. Luckily, he was in the group which managed to break through the initial ambush and narrowly escaped being killed. After arriving safely in Bihać he joined the Partisans and spent the rest of the war fighting for the liberation of Yugoslavia. Once the war ended, he decided not to return to his hometown and instead remained in Bihać.\textsuperscript{786}

From time to time, Džambegović would travel to Kulen Vakuf, generally for the funerals of relatives and friends. On such occasions, along with other local Muslim men, he would walk past the mosque in the centre of town towards the wooden bridge which spanned the shallow Ostrovica River. Looking up, he could see the old Ottoman fortress directly above on the ridge. After crossing under the steel railroad bridge, a steep pathway led up to the Muslim cemetery which spread out up the hillside in a field which had been cleared of the thick forest. Like small terraces, each gravestone stood slightly higher than the next on the slope. Before a burial, most of the men would pray together in Arabic, their hands stretched out in front of them with their palms turned towards their faces. When they finished, the coffin would be lowered into the ground and covered with the freshly dug earth. After completing these traditional death rituals in the cemetery, the men would return to town where they would often spend hours talking in private homes.\textsuperscript{787}

\textsuperscript{786} Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 27 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
After attending one of these funerals, and while gathered with other men from Kulen Vakuf, Džambegović began to speak about the Muslims who the insurgents had murdered in September 1941. He was especially disturbed by the absence of a monument for the victims. The solemn atmosphere of the funeral, and the concrete act of marking the grave of the deceased, may have contributed to him expressing such feelings. As an ex-Partisan fighter and member of SUBNOR, he may have felt a mounting sense of responsibility to do something to memorialize the many victims whose places of death had been unmarked for more than thirty years. After all, as a member of SUBNOR, he had been officially involved in some way or another in the construction of a number of other monuments in the wider Bihać region for many “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of


787 Ibid.
Fascist Terror.” Whatever the case, he told his former neighbors that some kind of monument needed to be built for the victims of the September massacres. Specifically, he felt that Golubnjača, the pit near the Serbian village of Martin Brod where the insurgents had murdered more than 400 Muslim men and boys, would be an appropriate site for a monument. His main concern was that if nothing was done to memorialize the site, then the terrible things that happened there would be forgotten forever. He stressed that he did not wish to have a monument built in order to stir up hatred between Serbs and Muslims. On the contrary, he wanted the mass killings of the region’s Muslims to be remembered so that nothing similar would ever happen again.788

As Džambegović spoke, the other men in the room stood in silence. Some were interested in what he had to say and listened closely, while others, once they heard his proposal, immediately started to worry that his comments would cause trouble. When he finished, a handful of them responded. One reminded him that the pit at Golubnjača was located in a one hundred percent Serbian area. Building a monument there for the Muslims who Serbs had murdered, he said, would be a provocative and potentially destabilizing act. Others, seemingly annoyed by his suggestion, chimed in, saying to Džambegović, “it’s not the time for such a thing!” Some said that “touching things from the past” simply made no sense. They reminded Džambegović that they were living well under socialism. They had health care, education, and “Brotherhood and Unity.” While it was mostly Muslims living in the Ljutoč valley, they added, there were still Serbs all around in the villages in the hills above, and more than a few of them worked in Kulen Vakuf on the railroad and in the factory. They were concerned as to how their Orthodox neighbors might react to such a monument. For them, it made no sense to start bringing

788 Ibid.
things up from the past more than thirty years after the war. One member of the League of Communists apparently brought the brief discussion to an abrupt end by declaring that the idea of building a monument was simply retrograde.\textsuperscript{789}

Shortly thereafter, Džambegović left Kulen Vakuf and returned to Bihać. His suggestion about building a monument at Golubnjača never went any further than the room in which he initially voiced his idea. But his act, and the response of other Muslims that day to it, sheds light on several issues related to the public culture of silence which crystallized in the region after the war. First, his proposal for a monument demonstrated that in spite of the political context which made publicly speaking about the killings of Muslims nearly impossible, some people nevertheless held on to a strong desire to engage in acts of remembrance, even after the passage of several decades. This suggests that the creation of a public culture of silence, even one as all encompassing as that which came into being in the Ljutoč valley, could not fully eradicate some people’s need to publicly remember their victims.

A second issue which Džambegović’s proposal illuminated was the pervasive nature of the public culture of silence, and especially its deep impact on Muslims in the region, and their complicity in its enforcement. Official war remembrance policy, while explicitly non-national, ultimately resulted in monuments being built for Serb civilian war victims, but not for their Muslim counterparts. Evidence exists which suggests that more than a few Muslims found this policy to be unfair, and believed that monuments

\textsuperscript{789} Ibid.
should also be built for their war victims. Yet in this instance, it was Džambegović’s former Muslim neighbors, many of whom had lost relatives and neighbors in the September massacres, who sharply criticized his idea for a monument. Some were afraid of how their Serb neighbors would react. Others believed that focusing attention on painful events from the war was pointless now that they were living so well. Their comments illustrate that the micro-level policing of remembrance policy was not simply carried out by those Serbs who sought to avoid implicating themselves as participants in the September massacres. Rather, local Muslims, who appear to have internalized aspects of the public culture of silence, showed themselves more than ready to enforce it. It was thus perhaps a paradoxical result that after more than thirty years of mandated silence about the killings, it was Muslims who quickly moved to shut down a rare proposal by one of their co-nationals who believed a monument needed to be built. The instance of Džambegović’s suggestion vividly illustrated the extent to which some Muslims in the region had become deeply enmeshed in enforcing and propagating the public culture of silence.

Not long after, the proposal by another resident of Kulen Vakuf, who also felt strongly that a monument should be built, produced a similar result. Adil Kulenović was born in 1949, and grew up hearing stories about the September massacres from his parents and their friends. His family survived the mass killings thanks to their close friendship with Serbs in the area. The *kum* [godfather] to Kulenović’s grandfather was a Serb from the nearby town of Donji Lapac (in Croatia). When the Ustashas began rounding up Serbs in the area and murdering them during the summer of 1941, this man

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brought a young Serb boy to Kulenović’s grandfather. He explained that he needed to run to the forests to hide from the Ustashas and he would no longer be able to look after the child. Kulenović’s grandfather took the child under his care and immediately gave him the Muslim name “Mujo.” Because of this, the boy survived the mass killings of Serbs which the Ustashas committed in the region between June and August 1941.791

Then, while attempting to flee from Kulen Vakuf to Bihać on 6 September 1941, Serb insurgents captured most of Kulenović’s female relatives, as well as the Serb boy who was still with them. They demanded to know where the women were from. They said they were from Kulen Vakuf, but the child yelled out that he was from Donji Lapac. The insurgents asked his real name and, after hearing it, quickly concluded that he was Serb. They asked the women why the child was with them, and they told the story of how the boy had come under their care. Among the insurgents were several from the Croatian town of Knin, and they ordered the others to make sure that no one touched the women and the boy. This was how Kulenović’s relatives survived the September massacres.792

As Kulenović grew up during the 1950s and 1960s, he heard scores of terrible stories about the massacres, but also knew that many of his relatives had survived because of their good relations with some of their Serb neighbors. His parents and other relatives always stressed that goodness existed in all types of people, regardless of their nationality. A crucial foundation of their worldview was their long-standing friendships with Serbs in the region, and especially the fact many of them survived the massacres.

791 Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo.

792 Ibid.
thanks to the Serb insurgents who respected their efforts in saving a Serb child. This home environment appears to have been a central reason why Kulenović eventually came to believe strongly in “Brotherhood and Unity.” Buttressing this sensibility was the education system which taught him that everyone in Yugoslavia, regardless of his or her nationality, was equal. And the war commemorations which he attended several times a year showed him that every war victim who had been on the side of the Partisan Movement was also equal, again regardless of nationality.793

While the idealistic Kulenović was serving in the Yugoslav People’s Army during the late 1960s and early 1970s, he had his first brush with those who held negative views about his hometown because of what happened there during the war. After a military exercise in the Bihać region, a Serb officer told the young soldiers that maintaining awareness about the political mood of the local population in a given region was of crucial importance. He then mentioned the town of Kulen Vakuf, and said that it was a prime example of an “Ustasha place.” Kulenović was shocked when he heard this, and later asked the officer why he had said such a thing. The man did not explain, and Kulenović, who was not especially politically aware during his late teens and early twenties, did not think anything more about the incident.794

This would soon change once Kulenović finished his army service in the early 1970s. He returned to Kulen Vakuf and joined the Association of Youth [Savez omladine], a socio-political organization for young people, especially for those who wished to one day become members of the League of Communists. Soon he became

793 Ibid.
794 Ibid.
president of its branch in Kulen Vakuf. At the time, the main responsibility of the position was to organize various events for the youth in the region, such as dances and games. But Kulenović felt that the organization could also play a political role. As he walked around Kulen Vakuf, he began questioning what he saw as a striking inequality: “Why was there no monument in Kulen Vakuf for the many victims killed here during the war? If we are all equal, then why are all of the dead not also equal?” 795 From his family and neighbors, he knew about the many Muslims who had been killed during the war, and he had read somewhere that “Chetniks” had murdered perhaps more than 2,000 Muslims in the region. “If this was true,” he wondered, “then why would it be a problem to build a monument for those victims?” 796

Kulenović decided to go to Bihać to look for information about the wartime history of Kulen Vakuf. He visited the regional office of SUBNOR, the socio-political organization responsible for maintaining records about the region’s war victims. Armed with a small amount of information about events in the region during the war, and, as he described in an interview, a large amount of ignorance about the complicated postwar political situation in his home region, he prepared a formal written request for the construction of a monument. His idea was that a monument needed to be built in Kulen Vakuf for all the war victims in the region, including Partisans, as well as Serb and Muslim civilians. He shared his document with several of his comrades in the Association of Youth, and then sent it on to the municipal committee of the League of Communists for Bihać, which by the 1970s had jurisdiction for Kulen Vakuf. 797

795 Ibid.

796 Ibid.

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Kulenović soon received a call from the committee. A member of the League wanted to meet with him immediately in Bihać regarding his request for a monument in Kulen Vakuf. Kulenović felt certain that he was invited to the meeting because the members of the municipal committee were enthusiastic about his idea. He imagined them sitting him down in their offices and saying, “This is wonderful, we’re so glad you remembered this, this is the right and just thing to do.” But the conversation unfolded very differently. Kulenović was greeted by a Muslim member of the League of Communists, a man around forty years old who had not fought in the war. He began with a long series of questions, including where the idea for a monument had come from; who else was involved with the proposal; and how Kulenović’s family had behaved during the war. Kulenović quickly realized that he had not been called in to be praised for his suggestion, but rather was being subjected to an *informativni razgovor*, or “informational conversation,” the euphemism used in Yugoslavia for an interrogation.

Once the League member concluded that Kulenović was not a so-called “enemy element,” but rather an idealistic and politically-naive young man, he turned the conversation in a different direction. He began talking about steel factories in Macedonia. The workers in these factories, the League member noted, were poorly educated, but their productivity was usually higher than other workers who were better educated. “A well-educated worker asks, ‘Why do we do this and not that?’ Those with less education do not ask such questions; they simply work, and because of this their

797 Ibid.
798 Ibid.
799 Ibid.
productivity is usually higher.”800 Kulenović was confused at first, but then realized that the man was trying to tell him indirectly not to think so much, and that those who think a lot and ask a lot of questions end up causing problems. 801

After having spent the majority of time interrogating Kulenović about his motives, and then trying to convince him to not think so much, the League member finally directly addressed his request for building a monument in Kulen Vakuf. “You know,” he said, “this just isn’t the right time for such a thing.”802 And he went on at some length repeating this point in a number of different ways, but without explaining why. After the meeting, Kulenović left feeling confused. He could not understand why someone would try to stop him from something that he believed was completely in accordance with Communist ideology. His entire life he had heard about the imperative to honor and remember the innocent civilian victims and Partisans who were killed in the war. This was the first time he had ever heard anyone saying that “it was not the right time” for the remembrance of war victims. It was at this point that Kulenović remembered the army officer who told him that Kulen Vakuf was an “Ustasha place.” He wondered if this had something to do with why no monument could be built.803

Upset and confused, Kulenović returned to Kulen Vakuf and decided to make one more attempt to realize his idea. He wanted to show the League of Communists in Bihać that he was not alone in his desire for a monument. And so he went around to his

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800 Ibid.
801 Ibid.
802 Ibid.
803 Ibid.
neighbors and others with whom he had good relations and told them about his idea. He asked them to sign a petition for a monument, which a handful agreed to do.\textsuperscript{804} Kulenović then sent this document to the League of Communists in Bihać. Once again he was immediately called to the city for a meeting. This time, however, he did not meet with a young Communist; instead he was sent to speak with a Muslim Partisan veteran who was an authority figure in the municipal organization of SUBNOR. The conversation was much more confrontational, and Kulenović had the feeling that the man saw him as a something of a dangerous element. The ex-Partisan told him bluntly:

It is still not time for our wounds from history to be opened. It still hasn’t been determined whether or not those who committed the killings [of Muslims in Kulen Vakuf] were insurgents or Chetniks. It’s not time to touch those wounds. General Karanović still has enormous influence…”\textsuperscript{805}

After this meeting Kulenović finally gave up on his idea of building a monument. In 1973, he left Kulen Vakuf to study at the University of Sarajevo.

As was the case with Džambegović’s proposal, the story of Kulenović and his idea for a monument resulted in Muslims telling other Muslims that “it was still not time to touch those wounds.” In this case, the men from the League of Communists and SUBNOR who spoke with Kulenović tried different approaches to communicate the political indigestibility of his proposal. The young member of the League drew on the

\textsuperscript{804} Ibid.; Interview with Đula Seferović on 3 October 2008 in Ostrovica. It is not clear how many people actually signed the petition. Only a small number of interviewees in Kulen Vakuf remembered Kulenović’s proposal for a monument, which suggests that he did not speak with many people about his plans. However, it should be noted that some of those he spoke with may had died in the meantime or been killed in the most recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995).

\textsuperscript{805} Interview with Adil Kulenović on 7 November 2006 in Sarajevo. General Nikola Karanović was an insurgent commander from the village of Ćovka, located not far from Kulen Vakuf. He was one of those who led the initial ambush on 6 September 1941 on the column of Ustashas, Domobrani, and Muslim civilians as they attempted to flee Kulen Vakuf. After the war he became a General in the Yugoslav People’s Army. For general biographical information, see Krajina, “Likovi boraca iz revolucije. Nikola Karanović,” 1 June 1961, 5.
example of workers from Macedonia to argue that those who ask fewer questions cause fewer problems. The ex-Partisan hinted at the still sensitive question of whether Chetniks or insurgents were guilty for the mass killings. And he pointed to the power that some of those insurgents-turned-Partisans, like General Nikola Karanović, who had been in command of some of the insurgents, still had in maintaining the silence about the September massacres. The case of Kulenović’s proposal was not only a clear example of how the authorities energetically policed the public culture of silence; it also demonstrated once again the extent to which some Muslims with positions of authority in the Bihać region had internalized this culture, functioning, in effect, as some of its key enforcers.

Kulenovic’s case also illustrated the vast gap that existed between Communist ideology and the reality of wartime events. In many respects, his thinking reflected several of the key values that the Communist regime sought to instill in young people, specifically the equality of all nationalities and the imperative to remember those killed in the war. However, the negative response to his proposal illuminated precisely where the Communist regime was ready to compromise on promoting these values for the sake of protecting the legacy of the Partisan Movement. Indeed, it was when Kulenovic tried to apply his ideas about equality to the complex reality of the war and development of the Partisan Movement in his home region that they became politically dangerous. To have implemented his proposal for the remembrance of all civilian war victims in the Kulen Vakuf region, the authorities would have been forced to publicly acknowledge that the Serb insurgents in the region, many of whom later became Partisans, were responsible for the murder of about 2,000 innocent Muslim men, women and children. This was would
have implicated a number of individuals in high-level positions, such as General Nikola Karanović, as having participated in some way in war crimes. During the early 1970s, this was something the authorities were clearly unwilling to do, and so Kulenovic’s proposal, like that of Džambegović, ultimately went nowhere.

A third attempt at building a monument eventually proved more successful, but only because of the Communist regime’s selective application of its contradictory political objectives. Meho Hasanagić was a Muslim from the village of Klisa. Before the war, he had spent a considerable amount of time working in a coal mine in France. His best friend who worked with him was a Serb from the village of Bušević, located not far from Klisa. They were like brothers. After the Ustashas took control in the Kulen Vakuf region, they came to Klisa and ordered all the Muslim men to report for participation in a so-called “economic action” to be carried out in Bušević. Hasanagić knew that this euphemism meant that the Ustashas needed men to help them attack the Serbs in that village. Hasanagić had no intention of helping them kill his best friend and so, like many other Muslims in Klisa, he ignored the Ustashas’ order and instead climbed up the hill in the center of the village where the mosque was located and hid behind it. The Ustashas eventually found him and ordered him to go with them to Bušević. He refused, saying he had no desire to kill his friend. One armed Ustasha approached him, yelling out, “So then why don’t I kill you instead of him?!” Hasanagić, who was holding a pistol, warned the man that if he came any closer he would shoot. The Ustasha did not stop, and so Hasanagić fired a bullet which killed him instantly. The other Ustashas then managed to overpower him, and they took him to the prison in Kulen Vakuf.806

806 Interview with Mujo Hasanagić (son of Muho Hasanagić) on 26 September 2008 in Klisa; Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 79.
On 6 September 1941, Hasanagić was still a prisoner among the Ustashas and Domobrani, who were leading the other refugees as they attempted to flee Kulen Vakuf from the insurgents. Unlike Džafer Džambegović and Adil Kulenović’s relatives, he did not succeed in making it past the first ambush by the insurgents, and encountered no Serbs who wished to protect him. There are two interpretations about his fate after this point. Esad Bibanović claims that the Ustashas murdered Hasanagić once they realized he was about to be captured by the insurgents.\footnote{Bibanović, Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena, 79.} This interpretation seems somewhat doubtful given that the Ustashas were engaged at that time in a life and death battle with the insurgents. A number of them did not survive the fighting and they may not have had time to think about executing one of their prisoners while their own lives hung in the balance. Hasanagić’s son Mujo offers a different interpretation about his father’s fate. He claims that his father, along with the rest of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley who were not killed in the initial ambush, were captured by the insurgents and returned to Kulen Vakuf. Later, they took him and more than 400 other Muslim men and boys to Martin Brod, and then murdered them all at Golubnjača.\footnote{Interview with Mujo Hasanagić on 26 September and 4 November 2008 in Klisa.}

Hasanagić’s son survived the September massacres and returned to Kulen Vakuf after the war. Due to the difficult economic situation in the region, he left for Belgrade in 1947 at the age of seventeen where he found work in construction. During the mid 1970s, he, along with his three brothers, decided they wanted to build a monument for their father. The improving political situation for the region’s Muslims and the economic boom were factors that appear to have influenced their decision. In 1976, Hasanagić
approached the leadership of the regional committee of the League of Communists in Bihać. He told them the story of what had happened during the war. His father, a Muslim, had killed an Ustasha because he wanted to defend his best friend, a Serb. Later, the insurgents murdered him at Golubnjača. Whether Hasanagić was actually killed there is beside the point. What matters is that his son believed that the insurgents murdered his father at the pit. It was with this interpretation of wartime events that he approached the local authorities with the idea of building a monument.

Local and regional members of the League of Communists responded that they were supportive of the request to build a monument for Hasanagić’s father when it came to the first part of his story, which they saw as a patriotic act that exemplified “Brotherhood and Unity.” But they indicated that they had no interest in memorializing his death at Golubnjača. Fully aware of the silence about the Muslims killed in the September massacres which had been dominant since 1941, Hasanagić did not question this dismissal of his desire to publicly remember his father’s place of death. Apparently, some Muslims in Klisa, who were related to the Ustasha that Hasanagić’s father had killed, found about the proposal and privately voiced their opposition to the monument among their neighbors, but they obviously had no capacity to influence the authorities. Ultimately, Hasanagić received permission from the League of Communists to build a small monument near the mosque in Klisa where his father had shot the Ustasha who was about to kill him. It was to be a memorial to a Muslim who risked his life to save a Serb and, as such, it was a memorial to “Brotherhood and Unity.”809 The inscription carved on the monument included the full name of Hasanagić’s father, the year of his birth and death, and the following words: “Stop man! Why are you attacking? Justice reigns

809 Ibid.
This was what Hasanagić’s father supposedly yelled out to the Ustasha just before he killed him. Next to the monument Hasanagić and his siblings built a gravestone for their father, although they did not have his remains to bury underneath it. Their father’s bones, they believed, were still deep inside the pit at Golubnjača, but they had no permission or means to retrieve them since the authorities continued to quietly enforce the unofficial ban on exhuming and burying the remains of Muslims murdered by the insurgents. The gravestone indicated the day and year of their father’s death as 27 July 1941, rather than 8 September 1941, which was the day the insurgents murdered the Muslim men and boys at Golubnjača. The 27th of July was the date that the Communist regime celebrated as the day that marked the beginning of the Communist-led insurgency in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, no aspect of the monument or gravestone conveyed what most believed to be the real time and place of Hasanagić’s death. To the satisfaction of the authorities, nothing about the site had any link to the mass killings of Muslims in September 1941.

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810 Photograph taken of the monument on 27 September 2008 in Klisa. In Bosnian the inscription reads as follows: “Stani čovječe kud si nahrnuo ovdje pravda vlada.”
32. Gravestone for Meho Hasanagić in Klisa indicating his date of death as 27 July 1941, the day the Communists celebrated as the start of the insurgency, rather than 8 September 1941, the date he was mostly likely murdered by Serb insurgents at the Golubnjača pit. Photograph taken by the author on 27 September 2008.

Like Džafer Džambegović and Adil Kulenović, the story of Mujo Hasanagic’s monument to his father demonstrates how a handful of individuals tenaciously held on to a desire to publicly memorialize their relatives and neighbors murdered in 1941, in spite of the public culture of silence. But unlike the other two, he ultimately succeeded in building a small monument because the local Communist authorities saw his father’s act of attempting to save his Serb friend as an example of “Brotherhood and Unity.” The fact that Hasanagić’s father was most likely killed at Golubnjača soon after because of
the lack of “Brotherhood and Unity” among many Serb insurgents towards their Muslim neighbors remained absent from the monument. This selective use of one individual’s wartime experience was a striking example of the extent to which the Communist regime was willing to silence the history of wartime mass killing in order to promote “Brotherhood and Unity.” In the act of excising from the monument how Hasanagić’s father was most likely killed, the regime indirectly revealed just how much it feared directly confronting the September massacres. After more than thirty years since the end of the war, this monument was the only public site of remembrance for a single victim of the September massacres which received official permission to be built. Paradoxically, as a site dedicated to war remembrance, it concealed the ultimate fate of the man it was built to memorialize.

The economic and political transformations which took place between the end of the Second World War and the late 1970s resulted in the dramatic revival of life for a majority of Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region. Their population grew, more jobs were available, they became an officially-recognized nationality, more and more assumed leadership positions in the League of Communists and offices of local government, and the region experienced an unprecedented level of economic prosperity. These structural transformations created a context for two contradictory tendencies when it came to remembering the September massacres. Some who benefited from the dramatic improvements held the view that raising questions about the mass killings could contribute nothing positive to improving life in the present. At the same time, a handful of others were emboldened to publicly voice their desires for monuments to be built for
some, or all, of the Muslims murdered in 1941, as well as for the rest of the region’s war victims.

The emergence of their voices elicited a series of responses that illuminated the pervasive nature of the public culture of silence, and the contradictory and opportunistic behavior of the Communist regime. Several of the proposals for monuments, such those by Džafer Džambegović and Adil Kulenović, caused Muslims to silence fellow Muslims, exemplifying the extent to which the culture of silence had permeated the consciousness of everyday life. No longer was an outside group necessary for policing the silence; many Muslims had been conditioned to do it themselves. These reactions strongly suggest the need for the complicity of many social groups in the enforcement of silence, even those who are being silenced by others.

As for the local authorities, their responses to the proposals for monuments revealed the limitations of two of the most important values which the Communist regime sought to instill in the population: the equality of nationalities and “Brotherhood and Unity.” When Adil Kulenović attempted to apply the principle of the equality of nationalities to the remembrance of Muslims killed in the September massacres, an act which threatened the legacy of the Partisan Movement, the authorities abruptly stopped supporting the principle of equality. When Meho Hasanagić’s wartime acts of resistance to the Ustashes exemplified “Brotherhood and Unity,” but his perceived manner of death at the hands of the insurgents did not, the authorities chose to memorialize the former and conceal the latter. In both cases, the authorities demonstrated that their sacrosanct principles of promoting “Brotherhood and Unity” and ensuring the equality of all people could be quickly adjusted or discarded if an individual questioned the silence about the
mass killings. As the decade of the 1970s came to a close, the many economic and political changes continued to transform Kulen Vakuf, and much of the Ljutoč valley, into a place of growing prosperity and hope. Yet in the more than thirty-five years since the end of the war, the maintenance of silence about the September massacres remained steadfast.
Chapter Eight

Silence Enshrined

Despite the prevailing silence about the September massacres, local leaders in Kulen Vakuf were nonetheless increasingly thinking about war remembrance and monuments during the late 1960s and 1970s. During these years there was a steady construction of memorials throughout the wider region in memory of “Fallen Fighters” and “Victims of Fascist Terror.” This was a constant reminder that their neighbors were taking advantage of the increased funds made available due to the regional economic boom to erect monuments.\(^{811}\) The increasing confidence of local leaders in Kulen Vakuf, which resulted in large part from the economic and political transformations discussed in the previous chapter, combined with knowledge of the ongoing construction of war monuments in the wider region, produced during the late 1970s the first serious calls to build some kind of war memorial in their town. Intent on dispelling the notion that Kulen Vakuf, as well as the rest of the Muslim villages in the Ljutoč valley, was an “Ustasha place,” local leaders decided that a monument for the “Fallen Fighters” from their region needed to be built. Ultimately, they succeeded in realizing this goal, and in doing so demonstrated that Partisans indeed came from their region. At the same time, the resulting monument exemplified just how embedded local leaders had become in

propagating the public culture of silence about the September massacres. Their monument, which used the remembrance of 147 Partisan fighters to disprove the notion of the region as an Ustasha place, made no reference to the most cataclysmic wartime event in the area: the mass killing of about 2,000 innocent Muslim civilians and the total destruction of Kulen Vakuf and its neighboring Muslim villages. Further buttressing the culture of silence was the simultaneous construction of a large memorial park for “Victims of Fascist Terror” at Garavice, located just outside the city of Bihać. This site was intended to function as a place of remembrance for all the civilian war victims in the region, regardless of their nationality. However, its location on a place where the Ustashas had murdered large numbers of Serbs confirmed yet again the implicit preferential treatment which the Communist regime afforded to Serb civilian victims. Taken together, both the monuments at Garavice for “Victims of Fascist Terror” and at Kulen Vakuf for “Fallen Fighters” effectively resulted in the literal concrete enshrinement of the public culture of silence about the September massacres.

By the mid 1970s, talk was increasingly in the air about building a monument in Kulen Vakuf for “Fallen Fighters” from the region. Local residents remember that members of SUBNOR, especially those originally from the region but who had since moved away because they were active members of the Yugoslav People’s Army, were among those most responsible for transforming the talk into concrete plans. Mehmed Šehović, who was born in Kulen Vakuf, and, by late 1970s was a retired colonel in the Yugoslav People’s Army who lived in Belgrade, was said to have been the most active in

812 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Ibrahim Lepirica on 8 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
advocating for the construction of a monument for “Fallen Fighters.” Along with several prominent local leaders and Partisan veterans, he formed a council for building a monument during 1978. It was composed of four Muslims and four Serbs, and included Šehović, Hajro Kulenović (the president of the council), Slavko Filipović, Nikola Majstorović, Halid Burzić, Boban Radak, Ale Galijašević, and Boško Kerkez. According to Ale Galijašević, a member of the council from Kulen Vakuf, their initial requests for permission to build a monument for “Fallen Fighters” were not well received by the regional organ of SUBNOR, the organization which had the authority to approve plans for the construction war monuments. When asked during an interview why there was resistance, one former Serb Partisan from Martin Brod alluded to the main problem by simply stating: “Ah….fuck it, things were not so simple there during the war…” After receiving the request by the council for building a monument, several of SUBNOR’s influential Serb members in Bihać apparently declared that they considered the area to be an “Ustasha place,” and they had no interest in changing this perception. As an alternative plan, they suggested that the monument for the region’s “Fallen Fighters” be built elsewhere, such as in the Serbian village of Prkosi, which also happened to be located very close to where the September massacres began. The majority of Partisans from the area, they argued, had come from the Serbian villages

813 Interview with Mehmed Štrkljević on 28 September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

814 This information comes from an unpublished photo album which was made available by Sadeta Ibrahimpašić, the designer of the monument in Kulen Vakuf. See Kulen Vakuf (1981), unnumbered pages.

815 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

816 Interview with Jovica Dilas on 16 October 2008 in Martin Brod.
which surrounded Kulen Vakuf and the rest of the Ljutoč valley. It therefore made better
sense to place the monument in one of their villages.817

A number of Muslim members of SUBNOR insisted that the monument needed to
be built in the centre of Kulen Vakuf. They used several arguments to justify their
position. To begin with, they noted that a number of men from the town had joined the
Partisans and were killed during the war while fighting with them. They believed that
their contribution to the Partisan Movement was as worthy of public remembrance as any
other. A monument for them, like those built in nearby towns and villages in the region,
would finally give these local “Fallen Fighters” the respect they deserved. Moreover,
they felt that a monument in Kulen Vakuf for local Partisans would provide concrete
evidence that the town and its region was not an “Ustasha place,” the unofficial but
widely shared designation which they deeply resented. Finally, they argued that a
monument would contribute to strengthening “Brotherhood and Unity” since the names
of Serb and Muslim Partisans would be presented together. This would be a memorial to
their collective struggle during the war against fascism, and would thus provide the
younger generations with a positive message about the multi-national legacy of the
Partisan Movement.818 After hearing these arguments, and most likely after some intense
behind-the-scenes maneuvering by council members such as Mehmed Šehović and Hajro
Kapetanović, who had significant political influence in SUBNOR, the regional organ of
the organization eventually granted the council permission to construct a monument.

817 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Mehmed Štrkljević on 28
September 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

818 Ibid.
The council’s first objective was to gather the funds necessary for the project. Apparently, they did not have difficulty in completing this task. The economic situation in the region at the end of the 1970s was one of expansion and increasing prosperity. As a result, most local residents of Kulen Vakuf and the surrounding region were in a position to make donations. Local governments in the wider region were also willing to give sizable contributions.\(^{819}\) The process of accumulating the necessary funds appears to have lasted from 1978 until 1980 or so. The next task was to compile the list of “Fallen Fighters” whose names would be carved on the monument. Between 1980 and 1981, the council formed four sub-commissions of SUBNOR members to determine the names of the Partisans to be remembered from Kulen Vakuf, as well as from the villages of Ostrovica, Klisa, Veliki Stjenjani, Kalati, and Rajinovci. A number of those who participated in the sub-commissions had been colonels and captains in the Yugoslav People’s Army, several of whom had moved to Belgrade or Sarajevo after the war. Together they determined the names of 147 Partisans to be memorialized on the monument. Of these, 109 were Serbs, while thirty six were Muslims, and two appear to have been Croats. These numbers, which did not reflect the national composition of the population, revealed the overwhelming dominance of Serbs in the region’s Partisan units. The members of the sub-commissions acknowledged that their lists were partial and remained open to suggestions from the wider community about other Partisan fighters who they may have overlooked.\(^{820}\)

\(^{819}\) The local governments of Bihać, Cazin, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, and Velika Kladuša all gave contributions. See Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.

\(^{820}\) The national composition of the sub-commissions was six Muslims and seventeen Serbs. The national breakdown of those “Fallen Fighters” to be carved on the plaque was not indicated explicitly in the documentary evidence, but can be deduced by reading the names of the Partisans. See MUSK, Zbirka
During 1979 or 1980, the council turned to a young female architect from Bihać named Sadeta Ibrahimpašić to design the monument. She was initially excited at the prospect of contributing to the construction of the first war monument in Kulen Vakuf. But she was also concerned that the council might ask her to design a memorial for the victims of the September massacres. Through private conversations with people from the region over the years, she had heard about the mass killing of Muslims which had occurred there in 1941. For her, building a monument in remembrance of those victims would be like opening Pandora’s Box. She did not believe in forgetting the terrible events of the war, but was concerned as to what might happen if she was “asked to touch that issue.” Doing so, she believed, would surely create some kind of ugly political situation. Moreover, she had no wish to design a monument that might weigh down the younger generations with a sense of guilt for terrible events in the past which they had nothing to do with.821 Her feelings of apprehension exemplified the pervasive nature of the public culture of silence, which obviously extended beyond the confines of the Ljutoč valley. Even this architect, who had not grown up in the area where the massacres occurred, had come to know that publicly addressing the events of September 1941 was politically dangerous and potentially destabilizing.

It was, therefore, a relief when the council members made no reference to the September massacres; their only interest was for her to design a monument for the “Fallen Fighters” from the region. The instructions were simple: the list of names needed to be carved on plaques, and the main theme was to be the “Brotherhood and

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821 Interview with Sadeta Ibrahimpašić on 29 September 2008 in Bihać.
Unity” of the fighters. Ibrahimpašić chose the symbol of a closed flower as the main motif for the monument. Concerned that the unopened flower she envisioned might resemble a nišan, or Muslim gravestone, she proposed to construct it with a hollow space between the petals so that there would be no ambiguity that it symbolized a flower. The site that she envisioned would be circular. In its centre would stand a large flower representing Yugoslavia. Surrounding it would be eight smaller flowers, each representing the six republics and two autonomous provinces in the Yugoslav federation. The four plaques would be positioned on the ground facing upwards at north/south and east/west positions, and carved on them would be the names of the 147 “Fallen Fighters” from the region. There would also be two fountains placed on the site. The monument would thus be a memorial to the Partisans killed fighting during the war, and would connect their deaths to the birth of a new socialist Yugoslavia, as symbolized by the large central flower and two fountains. The eight smaller flowers representing the individual republics and autonomous provinces would symbolize the equality of all nationalities and their existence in “Brotherhood and Unity.” Further emphasizing these themes would be the names of the “Fallen Fighters,” which were to be carved together in alphabetical order without any indication of nationality.

During this same period when the monument in Kulen Vakuf was being planned, another debate about a future monument was unfolding behind closed doors in Bihać. The site in question was Garavice, the place near Bihać where the Ustasha had murdered

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822 Ibid.

823 The six republics included Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia; the two autonomous provinces were Vojvodina and Kosovo.

824 Interview with Sadeta Ibrahimpašić on 29 September 2008 in Bihać; Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.
thousands of mostly Serb civilians during the summer of 1941. Throughout the first half of the 1970s, the local press reported that the building of a large monument on that site would soon begin. This was nothing new. Since the mid 1950s, regular talk and plans had been made and then discarded about exhuming the remains of the victims and building some of kind of large monument to replace the smaller one erected in 1949. However, in 1974, the council for building a monument on the site, in cooperation with the municipal parliament of Bihać, finally made the formal decision to begin construction of a large monument park.

Yet despite the near universal desire, and now formal decision, for the site to be quickly turned into a memorial complex, progress continued to be sporadic and slow. The need to gather sufficient funds was the most frequent reason which the authorities publicly cited as hindering the development of the project. However, according to Jusuf Zjakić, who was secretary of the regional organ of the League of Communists at the time, the real reason for the slow progress was a fierce debate behind closed doors over the number of Serbs killed, particularly among members of SUBNOR. Apparently some

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825 See, for example, Krajina, “Pripreme za izgradnju spomenika na Garavicama,” 25 May 1973, 2.


827 MUSK, Zbirka informacije o spomenicima NOB, f. 20, Garavice, Spomen Park žrtvama fašističkog terora, Socijalistička Republika Bosna i Hercegovina, Skupština opština Bihać, Odbor za izgradnju Spomen-parka žrtvama fašističkog terora Garavice, 1 January 1975, 1.

828 For example, a year later very little construction had actually taken place. A general plan for the site was adopted, property relations regarding the land to be used were sorted out, and some work was done on clearing the brush and trees from the area. See in Ibid., 2.

829 On decisions taken by the council for building the monument to precisely outline fundraising procedures and criteria regarding the various categories of those individuals and organizations that were to provide the funds, see in Ibid., Socijalistička Republika Bosna i Hercegovina, Skupština opština Bihać, Odbor za izgradnju Spomen-parka žrtava fašističkog terora Garavice, Odluka o utemeljivača Spomen-parka žrtava fašizma Garavice-Bihać, 22 January 1975, 1-2; Odluka o darovateljima Spomen-parka žrtava fašizma Garavice-Bihać, 22 January 1975, 1-2.
Serb members of the organization insisted that 12,000 victims needed to be memorialized, even though they lacked documentary evidence for such a high number. The inability of the council to come to an agreement with the members of SUBNOR over the number of victims blocked the transformation of the site into a large memorial in remembrance of “Victims of Fascist Terror.” A further hindrance may have been the increasing emphasis during the 1970s in Bosnia and Herzegovina on memorializing sites where famous Partisan military actions occurred. This subsequently reduced the amount of funds available at the republic level, as well as political will, for building large monuments on sites where mass killings of civilians had been committed. Thus, during the second half of the 1970s, the site at Garavice remained an important place for yearly commemorations and lectures which Partisan veterans gave to children about the horrors of the war, but serious construction on a new monument for “Victims of Fascist Terror” had yet to begin.

It seems that the increased building of large monument parks in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the late 1960s and 1970s in memory of “Fallen Fighters” ultimately helped the local authorities in Bihać to break the impasse. The opening of a large park in Mostar dedicated to Partisans from that region in 1965 led some in Bihać during the mid 1970s to seek out the man who designed it, the Serb architect Bogdan

830 Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać.

831 For example, although SUBNOR BiH indicated in a 1976 report that many sites where mass killings of civilians had been committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina were still unmarked, its reports argued that priority needed to be placed on building large monument parks at Kozara, Neretva, and Sutjeska, which were all sites where famous Partisan battles took place. See ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Prijedlog dugoročnog programa obilježavanja istorijskih područja, mjesta i lokaliteta iz perioda NOR-a i revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine, March 1976, 6-7.

Bogdanović. They engaged him to design a large monument park at Garavice and stated they did not wish to deal with the question of how many victims had been murdered there. Their stance, which held that the site needed to be transformed into a memorial park that did not in any way resemble an enormous cemetery, was one which had existed among some leaders in the Bihać region since the late 1960s.\footnote{For example, a document which the Council for Building the Remembrance Park for Victims of Fascist Terror produced in 1967 stated that “the remembrance park needs to be resolved without any cemetery-like elements, and nothing there should even lead to the association with the idea of a cemetery.” See MUSK, Zbirka informacije o spomenicima NOB, fas. 20, Garavice, Spomen Park žrtvama fašističkog terora, Odbor za izgradnju spomen parka žrtava fašističkog terora Bihać, June 1967, 2.} By avoiding the contentious issues of the numbers of victims, as well as what to do with their remains, it was finally possible to secure a consensus between the council for building the monument and SUBNOR. Both sides agreed that Bogdanović should design the memorial park, and that the question of the precise number of victims and their burial would be dealt with in the future.\footnote{Interview with Jusuf Zjakić on 5 December 2008 in Bihać.}

Throughout the second half of the 1970s, the council for building the monument amassed the necessary funds for the project. The main contributors were the municipal government of Bihać, SUBNOR Bihać, the republican government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a special committee of mostly Serbs from the region who had immigrated after the war to Belgrade.\footnote{MUSK, Zbirka informacije o spomenicima NOB, fas. 20, Garavice, Spomen Park žrtvama fašističkog terora, Spomen-park žrtvama fašističkog terora Garavice Bihać (undated pamphlet, printed most likely in 1981); Krajina, “Sjednica Odbora za izgradnju Spomen parka. Sredstva utrošena namjenski,” 31 July 1981, 6.} While the funds were being collected, Bogdanović created a design. The large memorial park was to be situated on top of a sharply rising hill at the Garavice site. At its summit, a series of fifteen towering abstract stone structures were to be constructed that would represent women. For Bogdanović,
the choice of the female figure was a way of injecting an element of hope and a sense of
rebirth into the memorial. “I chose the woman,” he said, “as a symbol of life.”836 The
female figures were to be positioned in such a way that they appeared to be watching
over the rest of the site, which was “a great field of victims.”837 Standing high on the
hill, they were to act as a bridge between the dark days of the war and light of the future.
In Bogdanović’s words: “They are standing, but seeing. They are standing and are filled
with worry. They are catching sight of the past and looking towards the future.”838

Unlike the small monument built at Garavice in 1949 by the municipal
government and citizens of the Bihać region, Bogdanović’s design for the new memorial
park was not to include any information about the nationality or number of victims. Even
though it was widely known that the vast majority of those killed at Garavice were Serbs,
Bogdanović stated that he did not wish to give the stone figures any kind of mark of
national identity.839 The main reason for this decision was that the local authorities
wished to use the memorial park at Garavice not just as a site of remembrance for the
mostly Serb “Victims of Fascism” who the Ustashas murdered there; they also
endeavored to present the site as a monument for all “Victims of Fascism” in the
region—Serbs, Muslims, Croats, and others.840 In this way, the memorial site would use

836 MUSK, Zbirka informacije o spomenicima NOB, fas. 20, Garavice, Spomen Park žrtvama fašističkog
terora, Spomen-park žrtvama fašističkog terora Garavice Bihać (undated pamphlet, most likely printed in


838 MUSK, Zbirka informacije o spomenicima NOB, fas. 20, Garavice, Spomen Park žrtvama fašističkog
terora, Spomen-park žrtvama fašističkog terora Garavice Bihać (undated pamphlet, most likely printed in

839 Ibid.

840 Ibid.
the remembrance of the mass killing of citizens of different nationalities in order to promote “Brotherhood and Unity.” As Hamdija Pozderac, a member of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, remarked shortly before the opening of the park in 1981, the memorial at Garavice was to be a symbol of “togetherness, humanism, freedom, and Brotherhood and Unity.” Asim Mujatović, the president of the municipal council of SUBNOR in Bihać, was more explicit about the purpose of the memorial park in a speech he gave in 1974 which marked the formal beginning of construction: “Monuments like this should strengthen the Brotherhood and Unity of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims and the other nations and nationalities.” The design of the monument park at Garavice thus reflected the desire of the authorities to de-nationalize the mass killings which had occurred there, and frame the park as a site of inclusive remembrance for “Victims of Fascism” of all nationalities.

During the last years of the 1970s and into 1980, the plans for the future monument at Garavice, as well as the work taking place at the site, were increasingly publicized, especially when important Partisan veterans would visit Bihać. The local authorities mobilized school children and teenage members of the Association of Youth to help in the effort to clear the site to make it ready for the installation of Bogdanović’s sculptures. By the end of the 1970s, the large female figures had been completed and had been positioned on the hilltop at Garavice. A regular sight during that time was the

work of local scout groups. Composed of boys and girls of all nationalities, they could be seen milling about near the sculptures, breaking stone with picks and shoveling it into wheelbarrows, creating a cloud of dust that permeated the air around the future memorial park. Like worker ants, they marched up and down the hill at Garavice throughout the spring and summer months of 1980-1981, intent on completing the site for its planned opening on 27 July 1981.845 Eventually, the authorities calculated that these children, along with teenagers from the Association of Youth and many adult activists, contributed nearly 10,000 volunteer hours to transforming the hill into a memorial park in accordance with Bogdanović’s plans.846

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As the work at Garavice neared completion, the residents of Kulen Vakuf were beginning the construction of their first monument for the “Fallen Fighters” from their region. Local members of the council, such as Ale Galijašević, were busy during the spring and summer of 1981 securing the stone and cement that would be necessary for the construction.\textsuperscript{847} The designer of the monument, Sadeta Ibrahimpašić, was occupied with meeting with the local men who were responsible for transforming her vision of the circular set of flowers into concrete structures. Creating the hollow stone figures was not

\textsuperscript{847} Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
a straightforward task, and it took them several tries until they determined the right kind of wooden mold with which to cast the flowers.\textsuperscript{848} The local authorities in Kulen Vakuf decided that the appropriate location for the monument would be on the left side of the primary school. The site would thus communicate daily to the younger generation its message of “the unbreakable Brotherhood and Unity” of the region’s multi-national population.\textsuperscript{849}

As was the case earlier in the year at Garavice, the site next to the school in Kulen Vakuf soon became filled with intense activity. A handful of men pounded stakes into the perimeters of the site. Joined by many others, they cleared the top soil away so that construction of the monument could begin. The children and teenagers of the Pioneer and Association of Youth organizations also participated, scraping off the soil and heaving rocks from the site. On several occasions, the mostly female teaching staff of the local school joined in, filling the site with a work crew of women in skirts hacking away at the soil with shovels. Local political activists, such as Halid Burzić, could frequently be seen at the site examining the large paper plans for the monument, debating over what tasks needed to be accomplished next. Soon men brought in large amounts of crushed stone for the base of the memorial, and then stacked the slabs of stone which would be used to build its walls. The sounds of shovels plunging into the earth gave way to those of men dumping stone out of wheelbarrows and mixing concrete. On most days the site

\textsuperscript{848} Interview with Sadeta Ibrapimašić on 28 September 2008 in Bihać.

was a buzz of activity, with men, children and teenagers working, while others would often stop by to inspect the progress and crack jokes with their friends and neighbors.850


850 Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.
Examining the plans for the monument in Kulen Vakuf. On the left is Halid Burzić (1929-1989), a member of the League of Communists from Kulen Vakuf and one of the individuals most responsible for the construction of the monument for “fallen fighters.” Source: Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.

At the end of July 1981, while the residents of Kulen Vakuf sweated under the summer sun constructing their monument, the local authorities in Bihać were making the final preparations for the opening of the memorial park at Garavice. They expected tens of thousands of people from the wider region to attend the opening ceremony. A number of those arriving to Bihać were survivors of the Ustasha mass killings. Many had lost large numbers of their extended families. Some had gone on to join the Partisans. The act of walking around the site and looking at the newly constructed memorial park brought back their painful wartime memories. As one female visitor recalled: “I was

twelve years old, but I remember, I remember too well when things burned. Our house in flames, without a roof, and the dead on the ground.”


The opening of the memorial park at Garavice, a goal for the regional authorities ever since the end of the war, took place on 27 July 1981, the day which marked the fortieth anniversary of the Communist-led insurgency in the region. The main speaker at the ceremony was Hamdija Pozderac, member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the most influential political personality from the region. His speech that day exemplified the contradictory issues that the authorities wished to communicate through the memorial park. “In our country,” he began, “there are many regions and places where the fascist occupiers and domestic traitors committed unprecedented atrocities against innocent people of all nations and nationalities. One of

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those was Garavice which, by number of patriots killed, is among the largest sites of mass killing and fascist evil deeds.”\textsuperscript{854} This formulation reflected the Communist regime’s attempt to frame the wartime mass killings as a fate which affected all nationalities. This, of course, obscured the fact that various perpetrators specifically singled out certain national groups for violent expulsion and, in some cases, extermination. Pozderac’s comment also highlighted the murky nature of many of these killings, which was a result of the regime’s reluctance to adequately investigate many war crimes. When it came to the case of Garavice, forty years after 1941 the number of victims murdered there could be called “among the largest,” but a precise figure was still unknown.

However much the authorities wished to downplay the specifically national nature of the wartime killings, Garavice was well-known in the region as a site where the Ustashas had murdered large numbers of Serbs. Pozderac did not avoid mentioning this. “Here on this place,” he said, “the Ustashas and the Germans carried out genocide against the innocent Serb population…”\textsuperscript{855} But in the same sentence he was sure to stress that many others were also killed at Garavice, including politically “advanced [i.e., Marxist consciousness] Muslim and Croat workers, citizens and youth, and a number of Jews of Bihać and the surrounding region.”\textsuperscript{856} In this way, Pozderac acknowledged that Serbs made up a large portion of the victims, but continued to stress the multi-national composition of the victims. This formulation was a means of paving the way to the


\textsuperscript{855} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{856} Ibid.
central purpose of his speech: to emphasize the crucial importance of the wartime development of “Brotherhood and Unity.” In his words: “The idea of Brotherhood and Unity and full national equality became the foundation of our National Liberation Struggle and an essential component of the strategy of the Communist Party in the Socialist Revolution. It was, as Tito emphasized, one of the main sources of our strength and the guarantee of all of our victories.”

By first pointing to the multi-national composition of the victims, and then highlighting the role of “Brotherhood and Unity” in the success of the Partisan Movement, Pozderac attempted to draw a link between the civilian victims and the Partisans. The essential message was that people of all national backgrounds were killed; yet the mass killings helped to compel them to join together to fight against and ultimately defeat those who sought to destroy others on the basis of their nationality.

As for the memorial park in remembrance of “Victims of Fascist Terror,” its construction was a way of showing how strong the resistance was, and still remained, to the mass violence which occurred during the war. As Pozderac said, “This memorial complex appears as if it wants to negate the crimes and evil deeds.”

The central means of realizing this objective was the replacement of the “cruelty and savagery” of the war with “love and a warm brotherly hand,” a notion which the sculptures in the park were designed to convey.

A stone placed on the path which led to the summit of the hill where the female figures were located communicated this message of hope. On it was


858 Ibid.

859 Ibid.
carved the following inscription: “Life is Stronger than Death, Justice is Stronger than Crimes, Love is Stronger than Hatred.” This message, with its expression of universal values, was designed to be acceptable to everyone who visited the park.

Yet these words said nothing about the specific wartime events which took place at Garavice. Moreover, they were a radical revision of what had been carved on the monument which had been built on the site in 1949. That plaque stated that Serbs were the main victims; that the perpetrators were the Ustashas; and that they had murdered 12,000 Serbs. While others beside Serbs had been murdered at Garavice, and 12,000 was an exaggeration of the number of victims, the 1949 plaque nonetheless attempted to engage the key questions of who was killed, how many victims there were, and who was responsible for the killings. In an attempt to portray the park as a memorial for all “Victims of Fascist Terror,” the new plaque erased all sense of historical specificity. In place of concrete historical facts about the killings committed on the site in 1941, it offered a set of general ahistorical universal values.860

The opening of the memorial park at Garavice illuminated two central issues of Communist regime’s remembrance policies. First, the park demonstrated how far the authorities were willing to go by the early 1980s to explicitly de-nationalize the nationalist violence which occurred during the war. The memorial park avoided engaging the historical fact that the Ustashas had murdered thousands of mostly Serb civilians at Garavice. Instead, it communicated a sense of hope for the future through the

860 In 1986, a new plaque was mounted on large stone which was positioned at the beginning of the path leading up the summit of the memorial park at Garavice. Its inscription stated that the Ustashas had killed 12,000 victims from the wider region (and listed several areas), but made no mention of the nationality of any of those killed. On the unveiling of this plaque, see Krajina, “Da se nikad ne ponovi,” 4 July 1986, 1-2; “Svećanost ljubavi i pravde na Garavicama kod Bihaća. Pobjeda, života, pravde i ljubavi,” 11 July 1986, 1; “Sjećanje na patnje i stradanja,” 11 July 1986, 2-3. For photographs of the new plaque, see MUSK, Zbirka fotografije, Spomen ploča na Garavicama.
female figures; a set of universal values including life, justice and love through the plaque; and, of course, the message of “Brotherhood and Unity.”

Second, the memorial park at Garavice exemplified what could be accomplished in remembering civilian war victims when the historical events in question posed no threat to the legitimacy of the Communist regime. Unlike the September massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf, the killings which took place at Garavice in 1941 did not call into question the wartime behavior of those who eventually joined the Partisans. The mass killing at Garavice of Serbs by the Ustasha exemplified the nationalist violence that the Partisan Movement opposed. Constructing a memorial park on the site fit perfectly with what the Communist regime sought to commemorate in order to promote “Brotherhood and Unity.”

The intention of the local authorities in the Bihać region to use the memorial park as a site of remembrance for all “Victims of Fascist Terror,” regardless of their nationality, caused complications. The memorial park was built on a place where mostly Serb civilians had been murdered, and everyone in the region knew this. The fact that such a large monument was constructed on that site implicitly confirmed the privileged position that the regime afforded to Serb “Victims of Fascist Terror.” Like other monuments built in the region between the late 1940s and 1970s for “Victims of Fascist Terror,” the existence of a memorial park at Garavice once again communicated that a hierarchy existed when it came to civilian war victims. By virtue of its location, the park was, in effect, yet another example of the possibility of remembering Serbian wartime suffering, albeit in explicitly non-national terms, and the continued impossibility of remembering other innocent civilian war victims, such as the Muslims murdered by Serb
insurgents in and around Kulen Vakuf. After all, the park was not built on a site where Muslim civilians had been murdered; yet the authorities felt that a memorial with no explicit national reference to any victims, but nonetheless located on a site where mostly Serbs had been killed, could somehow also function as a site of remembrance for Muslims and others.

The memorial park Garavice was thus a paradox: its intent was be inclusive of all nationalities; yet its location reaffirmed the space available for remembering Serb civilian victims, while at the same time buttressed the silence which crystallized after the war about Muslim civilian victims. In this way, the memorial indirectly contributed to enshrining the silence about the Muslims murdered in and around Kulen Vakuf in September 1941. Theoretically, the park was supposed to serve as a site of remembrance for all the “Victims of Fascist Terror” in the region, which could have included those murdered in the September massacres. Yet in practice, it was yet another monument to Serb civilian war victims, albeit without acknowledging them in national terms.

In the months that followed the opening of the memorial park at Garavice, the residents of Kulen Vakuf continued the task of finishing the first monument ever to be built for “Fallen Fighters” in their town. On the site next to the primary school men built a circular wall which they filled with soil. In its centre they placed the largest sculpture of the closed flower and then surrounded it with the rest. Then, along with children, teenagers, and women, they raked the soil and planted roses which were to bloom in the colors of the Yugoslav flag and in the shape of a Partisan cap.861

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37. Working to complete the large flower in the center of the monument in Kulen Vakuf. Source: *Kulen Vakuf*, unnumber pages.

38. School children participating in a work action to plant flowers at the site of the monument in Kulen Vakuf. Source: *Kulen Vakuf*, unnumbered pages.
The local authorities decided that the unveiling of the monument would take place on 3 November 1981, the year of the fortieth anniversary of the Communist-led insurgency, and on the day designated as the annual celebration of the local community of Kulen Vakuf. At one o’clock in the afternoon everyone from the region was to assemble at the monument for the opening ceremony. A special invitation printed in the regional newspaper urged all Partisan veterans from Kulen Vakuf and Orašac to attend the unveiling.862

On 3 November 1981, Kulen Vakuf looked strikingly different from the ruins which were left at the end of the war. A journalist sent by the regional newspaper Krajina to cover the event noted, like the Partisan commander Đoko Jovanić did just before the massacres of the Muslims from the region began on 6 September 1941, that everything in the town looked clean and orderly. The facades on the many new buildings, such as that of the volunteer fire department, were in perfect condition. The streets were swept clean. Items on the balconies arching out from houses were neatly arranged. The presence of newly-constructed infrastructure was impressive: the new health station, post office, gas station, and lamp-posts which lined the bridge spanning the Una and other streets in the centre of town. The newest addition to the town was a soon-to-be-opened library with 1,500 books and a reading room.863 The physical reminders of the death and destruction wrought in 1941 were gone. In place had arisen a developed


and prosperous town where work was available for most, and where the streets and school were filled with the sounds of children.


At 1:00 PM on 3 November, several thousand people assembled at the site of the monument. A group of Partisan veterans from the region dressed in suits and ties stood in the front row of the crowd opposite a podium which was positioned next to the monument. They held wreaths. The crowd was filled with people of all ages. Many relatives of the Partisans whose names were carved on the four plaques were present. The cultural-artistic society [kulturno-umjetničko društvo], composed mostly of children from the region, had spent weeks preparing for the event. Dressed in folk costumes, a number of them held hands and began to dance the kolo, a circular dance, spinning

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864 Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.
around the monument. Others stood in rows and sang songs.\textsuperscript{865} Young men and teenagers climbed on to rooftops of nearby houses to get a better view.\textsuperscript{866}


The first speaker was retired General Hajro Kulenović, a Muslim originally from the region, who had played a key role in lobbying for the construction of the monument. He began by stressing the contribution of the people of Kulen Vakuf and Orašac to the “People’s Liberation War.” These “sons and daughters” answered the call of Tito and the Communist Party to join the battle for liberation. “They, along with the fighters from other regions of the country, wrote with their blood the most celebrated pages of our


\textsuperscript{866} Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.
history and forged the greatest legacy of our revolution: the Brotherhood and Unity of our nations and nationalities.” 867 With these words, Kulenović sought to overturn the decades-old stereotype of the region as an “Ustasha place.” In place of it, he portrayed the people of Kulen Vakuf and its surrounding villages as having contributed to the Partisan Movement and the development of “Brotherhood and Unity.” Those Partisans from the area who were killed during the war, Kulenović continued, died not only “for the victory of the Revolution, for Brotherhood and Unity,” but also for “for the better and happier life of the younger generations.” 868 With this, he tied together existence of Partisans from the Kulen Vakuf region, their efforts during the war to cultivate “Brotherhood and Unity,” and how these acts laid the foundation for the prosperous world in which the postwar generations now lived.

This part of Kulenović’s speech was essentially no different from other speeches which local political personalities gave during the unveilings of war monuments in thousands of towns and villages throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the decades after the war. What was most interesting about the unveiling in Kulen Vakuf was what went unsaid. While Kulenović honored the memory of 147 Partisan fighters in his speech, he also sought implicitly to overturn the notion that Kulen Vakuf and its region was an “Ustasha place.” But he could not explicitly mention this objective, and the unfairness of this characterization, without also touching the subject of the September massacres. Doing so would have entailed mentioning that a small number of Muslims from the region had been Ustashas who had participated in the mass killing of Serbs. And this


868 Ibid.
could have logically resulted in mentioning that Serb insurgents and peasants responded to these mass killings by murdering nearly 2,000 of their innocent Muslim neighbors.

Kulenović did not mention any of these issues. His main purpose was simply to demonstrate that Partisans had indeed come from the region. This would be sufficient to disprove the notion that the area was an “Ustasha place” without requiring any further discussion of the complex wartime history of mass killing in the Kulen Vakuf region. In this way, Kulenović’s speech exemplified the extent to which political personalities from the region had internalized the culture of silence about the September massacres, and were enmeshed in propagating it. For him, the unveiling of the monument was an occasion to challenge the myth that the Kulen Vakuf region was an “Ustasha place,” which was a key element in sustaining the culture of silence. But Kulenović did so without calling attention to the history of mass killing in the region which was the main reason the stereotype had originally come into existence. His speech thus indicated that one aspect of the culture of silence—the notion that the Kulen Vakuf region was an Ustasha place—could be implicitly challenged and hopefully overturned; publicly calling attention to the underlying reasons for its existence, however—the complex nature of the mass killing of Serbs and Muslims during the war—still remained impossible.

Yet looming large on that day in Kulen Vakuf, where everything had been rebuilt since the end of the war and where everything was now clean and orderly, was the shadow of the September massacres. The presence of the mass killings was personified in the man who the local authorities had chosen to unveil the monument: retired General Nikola Karanović. As one of the highest ranking individuals in the Yugoslav People’s
Army ever to come from the region, the local and region authorities most likely viewed his participation as an essential to successfully staging the opening ceremony. Karanović was known to the people of the region as the Serb insurgent commander from the nearby village of Ćovka who led the initial attack on the column of Muslim refugees attempting to flee Kulen Vakuf on 6 September 1941. Some Muslims considered him directly, or at least indirectly responsible for the beginning of the massacres since he did not act to prevent, or could not stop, those Serb insurgents under his command from murdering hundreds of Muslims near the villages of Prkosi and Ćovka.870 His participation in the unveiling was a direct reminder of the September massacres. Moreover, it illustrated one of the central dynamics which underpinned the public culture of silence: the shared knowledge of the mass killings and the prohibition against speaking openly about them. Among those gathered in the crowd were literally hundreds of survivors of the September massacres, as well as their children. Quietly they stood opposite the short general with dark graying hair and a mustache who had been in command of the insurgents who had begun the mass killing of nearly 2,000 of their relatives and neighbors in 1941. Yet neither Karanović nor anyone in the crowd said a word about these events. Instead, he praised the bravery of the “Fallen Fighters” whose names were carved on the four plaques, and those in the crowd listened to him and then applauded when he finished his speech.871 The monument in Kulen Vakuf was thus

869 On the participation of General Nikola Karanović at the unveiling of the monument in Kulen Vakuf, see in Ibid and Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.

870 Interview with Derviš Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 and 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

871 Unfortunately, the text of Karanović’s speech was not printed in the regional newspaper Krajina and a copy does appear to have been preserved in the local archives. For some basic details about his participation in the unveiling of the monument in Kulen Vakuf, see Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.
officially unveiled. Karanović’s presence at the ceremony was a striking moment which epitomized the pervasive nature of the culture of silence. A man who was connected to the perpetrators of the September massacres directly addressed the survivors on the subject of the remembrance of war victims; yet both he and they knew, and did not question, that nothing could be said publicly about the Muslim civilians murdered in 1941.

41. Retired General Nikola Karanović, a commander of the insurgents who attacked the column of Ustashes, Domobrani and Muslim refugees on 6 September 1941, addresses the crowd during the unveiling of the monument in Kulen Vakuf. Source: Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.

However, the unveiling did provoke a number of private conversations that day about the events of September 1941. There was one aspect of the new monument which, for a number of Muslims in the crowd, conjured up powerful memories of the massacres. Several approached the monument after the unveiling to read the names of the “Fallen Fighters” carved on the four plaques. Many were familiar to older residents of the area.
What shocked several in the crowd was that they recognized a number of the Serbian names as having been insurgents who apparently had taken part in the attack on the Ljutoč valley. Some quietly commented to their relatives and neighbors that several of these Serbs had directly participated in the September massacres. While nearly everyone at the ceremony was pleased that a monument had finally been built in Kulen Vakuf, some whispered among themselves that when it came to certain names on the plaques, “this one or that one didn’t deserve to be carved there.” Soon the story began to spread that carved on the plaques were the names of some Serb “Fallen Fighters” who had been insurgents in 1941 and who had slaughtered innocent Muslims before going on to join the Partisans.

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872 Interview with Derviş Kurtagić on 9 November 2006 and 26 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf; Sead Kadić on 3 November 2008 in Bihać; Derviş Dervišević on 1 October 2008 in Klisa; Adem Dervišević on 1 October 2008 in Klisa.

873 Interview with Ibrahim Lepirica on 8 November 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.

874 Interview with Ale Galijašević on 12 October 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
42. Local residents from the Kulen Vakuf region read the names of the “fallen fighters” carved on plaques. Some were apparently later recognized as insurgents who participated in the massacres of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley between 6-8 September 1941. Source: Kulen Vakuf, unnumbered pages.

It is not possible to verify this testimony given the lack of documentary evidence about the insurgents who were involved in the September massacres. But given that the vast majority of Serb insurgents from the region had taken part in the attack on the Ljutoč valley in early September 1941, it is certainly possible that some who went on to become Partisans, and were killed later on the war, had participated in the mass killings of Muslims. In any case, the belief that some of the names were those of the perpetrators of the September massacres placed local residents in a difficult situation. In pursuit of shaking off the notion that their region was an “Ustasha place,” they contributed money and volunteered time to construct a monument for “Fallen Fighters” from their region. In

875 Interviews conducted with elderly residents in the region, during which they were shown a list of the names which had been carved on the plaques, did not result in clarification of this issue.
doing so, they sought to memorialize the lives of local men who they believed had fought and died for the liberation of their country. But getting out from under the disparaging label of “the Ustasha place” had its price: the tacit agreement not to publicly remember the mass murder of nearly 2,000 of their relatives and neighbors by Serb insurgents. And yet the monument for “Fallen Fighters” conjured up memories of the September massacres by apparently commemorating some of the men who had been perpetrators of those killings. Paradoxically, the act of remembering “Fallen Fighters” through the monument, which would preserve the public culture of silence about the September massacres, ended up indirectly contributing to questioning it.

Yet the lasting effect of the construction of the monument was to mark the physical enshrinement of the silence about the victims of the September massacres. Ever since the end of the war, various groups had contributed to promoting and enforcing the culture of silence about the September massacres in various ways. After forty years without a single memorial to any aspect of the war, local political activists and citizens worked together to construct a site of remembrance in celebration of the heroic wartime acts of 147 Partisans. In accordance with Communist ideology, this monument was to communicate that men of different faiths and nationalities came together during the war to resist and ultimately defeat the fascist occupier and its domestic collaborators. The remembrance of the mass murder of nearly 2,000 Muslims by Serb insurgents, which was the most cataclysmic wartime event in the region, could not be assimilated into the political message of the new monument. The imperative to promote “Brotherhood and Unity” through the remembrance of “Fallen Fighters,” which would also disprove the long-standing notion that Kulen Vakuf and its region was an “Ustasha place,” were
concerns that overshadowed all others. The celebration of wartime “Brotherhood and Unity” went hand in hand with the promotion of the culture of silence about the mass killings which epitomized its absence. “Brotherhood and Unity” and the culture of silence were not only contradictory elements of Communist remembrance policy; they were its two essential parts.

The year 1981 marked three key forty-year anniversaries in the Bihać region: the Communist call for the insurgency against the occupier and its domestic collaborators on 27 July 1941; the climax of the Ustasha mass killing of Serbs at Garavice; and the mass killings by Serb insurgents of nearly 2,000 Muslims from the Ljutoč valley in and around Kulen Vakuf. Throughout the decades after the war, the local authorities promoted the public remembrance of the first two events in ways that they hoped would cultivate “Brotherhood and Unity,” while they simultaneously enforced a public culture of silence about the third. The monuments which were unveiled at Garavice and Kulen Vakuf in 1981 served as the physical enshrinement of these remembrance policies.

The memorial park at Garavice illustrated the extent to which the local authorities sought to denationalize the region’s largest site of mass killing in order to present it as a place of remembrance for “Victims of Fascism” of all nationalities. They chose not to emphasize that the site was a location of mass killing whose primary victims were of Serbian nationality. Yet this decision could not erase the fact that everyone knew that the vast majority of those murdered at Garavice were Serbs. In effect, the construction of the memorial park at Garavice, despite the official position that it was supposed to be a site of remembrance for all civilian war victims, yet again confirmed the privileged position
that the Communist regime afforded to Serb “Victims of Fascism.” The fact that the memorial was built on a site where mostly Serbs had been killed had the effect of contributing to the physical enshrinement of the culture of silence about the victims of the September massacres. How could one be expected to remember those Muslim victims at Garavice when they had not been killed there but rather in and around Kulen Vakuf? How could they be mourned in the new memorial park when everyone knew that Serbs were the main victims who had been murdered at that place? The attempt by the Communist regime to portray Garavice as a site of remembrance for all “Victims of Fascist Terror” thus further contributed to the culture of silence about the Muslim civilian victims of the September massacres.

The monument for “Fallen Fighters” unveiled in Kulen Vakuf had the same effect, although to a much greater extent and for different reasons. That monument was designed to honor the memory of 147 Partisans. The authorities hoped that the site of remembrance would promote “Brotherhood and Unity,” as the monument celebrated the collective struggle of both Serbs and Muslims. But the unveiling on 3 November 1981 produced a series of situations that illuminated how the promotion of this objective simultaneously promoted the culture of silence about the September massacres. On that day, those in the crowd, who included large numbers of survivors, listened to a speech by Nikola Karanović, who was one of the men who led the attack on their region, and was in command of some of the insurgents when they began the mass killings. Those who were assembled listened as he praised the wartime deeds of the “Fallen Fighters” from their region. Later, some Muslims read the names of those men on the monument plaques and apparently discovered that some had participated in the murder of their relatives and
neighbors. But they could do nothing about these revelations except whisper among themselves. In short, the day produced the bizarre and disturbing scene of the survivors of the September massacres listening to a man who led the attack on them while he praised the deeds of his fighters, some of whom may have directly participated in the murder of their relatives and neighbors. The imperative to promote the ideal of “Brotherhood and Unity,” without also acknowledging that the sincere supporters of this ideal had during the war assimilated into their ranks some of those who had committed mass killings of innocent Muslims, produced this ironic, if not perverse moment of public remembrance. In the end, the monument in Kulen Vakuf, and the situation which unfolded during its unveiling, was not the result of the misapplication of the Communist ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity”; on the contrary, it was the disturbingly logical consequence of the striking disjuncture between that lofty ideology and the complex and grim reality of the war.
Conclusion

This dissertation began as a search for answers to the main questions that emerge from the 1986 SUBNOR report on the sites of mass killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Why were so few monuments built in places where Muslim civilians were killed during the Second World War? How was a public silence about these war victims possible in a country whose Communist leadership was explicitly committed to promoting the equality of all nationalities? Most of the existing literature is of little use in answering these questions because it portrays the Communist regime as attempting to “de-ethnicize” the remembrance of all of the inter-ethnic violence of the Second World War in Yugoslavia. As a result, the striking inequality in war remembrance for Muslim civilian victims has remained largely hidden from view, or, in the rare case when mentioned, poorly explained. This dissertation, which reconstructs and analyzes the specific dynamics of wartime violence in the Kulen Vakuf region to explain the emergence of the postwar silence about the Muslim civilians murdered there, aims to surmount these weaknesses in the existing scholarship.

The German invasion of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent establishment of the NDH, destabilized the traditional order in every community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the Kulen Vakuf region, this historical accident compelled a small number of Croats and Muslims—less that one percent of their respective communities—to join the Ustaschas. Without the German invasion, it is unlikely that such individuals would have ever assumed a position other than that of a politically marginal and numerically insignificant group of right-wing nationalists. Class and confessional-national conflicts in the region were historically entwined due to the Ottoman Empire’s pattern of conquest.
and settlement, as well as because of the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom’s inability to solve the country’s complex agrarian and national questions. These factors combined to pit Muslim landowners and merchants against Serb Orthodox peasants. Yet these structural dimensions of social relations did not predetermine an explosion of mass violence between these two groups. Aside from the rebellion of 1875-1878, in which both Christians and Muslims committed violence against each other on a limited scale, there had not been instances of mass violence in the Kulen Vakuf region prior to 1941. The existence of clear confessional and national cleavages, and even serious tensions and disputes along these lines, had been a part of life in the Ljutoč valley for centuries without resort to mass killing. The historic tradition of inter-ethnic neighborliness and friendship served as a powerful counterweight to those who, in certain moments, sought to perpetrate ethnically-based violence. This was demonstrated most strikingly by the efforts of Serbs who stopped fellow Serbs in 1918 from carrying out a massacre of Muslims in Kulen Vakuf in the wake of the government’s decrees on agrarian reform.

The establishment of the NDH in the wake of the German invasion of Yugoslavia was critical in facturing this local ecosystem of inter-ethnic social relations and setting the stage for a period of unprecedented mass ethnic violence. The NDH regime offered local Croats and Muslims unexpected and, for some, perhaps even “irresistible” opportunities to perpetrate violence against their Serb neighbors. The existing evidence makes it difficult to precisely explain what motivated each individual who joined the Ustashas in the Ljutoč valley. But desire for material gain, resentments about agrarian reform and the politics of the Serbian-dominated interwar government, personal

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876 On how outside actors can offer locals “irresistible” opportunities to carry out violence against their neighbors during periods of civil war that they most likely would not have otherwise, see Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 389.
disputes, and peer pressure (as more than a few Ustashas came from the same extended families) all seem to have been contributing factors. Interestingly, although these individuals were empowered by a regime committed to purifying the NDH of non-Croats, the view from the perspective of local community suggests that this objective may not have been of primary importance to the Ustashas of the Ljutoč valley. Rather, it seems that at least some were driven more by local concerns, such as plundering their Serb neighbors and settling personal scores. As scholars of mass violence in other contexts have observed, the sudden collapse of the old order, and the assumption of power by a clique committed to using violence to establish authority, often presents a unique opportunity for certain groups to “privatize politics.”

Seen this way, while the Ustashas’ violence in the Kulen Vakuf region appeared to flow from the ideological objectives of the Ustashas in Zagreb, the motivations and goals of its local foot solidiers may not have been so directly connected to the larger ethnic purification project of the NDH’s ideologues.

This suggests that widespread levels of preexisting “ethnic hatred” or deep ideological commitment to the overarching objectives of the NDH’s leadership may not have been necessary for the eruption of mass local violence in the Kulen Vakuf region during the summer of 1941. Long-term conflicts and tensions stemming from the pre-World War Two period, especially those related to the agrarian question, were certainly important in structuring the context which witnessed the decision by a small number of Croats and Muslims to join the Ustashas and perpetrate violence against their Serb neighbors. But it was unexpected situational factors—i.e., the German invasion and the establishment of the NDH—that provided the crucial trigger for the eruption of mass

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877 On this point, see especially Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 117-118.
violence. The point is not to discount prewar historical factors when explaining what motivated Muslims and Croats to join the Ustashas. But what demands special emphasis is the fundamental role of the war and the resulting rapid destruction of the prewar order in paving the way to the initial wave of mass killings. Again, without the German invasion and the assumption of power by the Ustashas it is unlikely that locally-driven mass violence would have begun in the Kulen Vakuf region during the summer of 1941.

The Ustasha mass killings of Serbs engendered resistance from more than a few Croats and Muslims who had previously known only friendship with their Serb neighbors. They took great risks to warn and protect their Orthodox neighbors and in so doing were able to save the lives of a significant number. Such acts brought about the first major paradox of the wartime period: the Ustasha attempt to use mass violence to remove the Serb community unintentionally contributed to strengthening the long-term tradition of inter-ethnic friendship among one part of the population. This finding deserves emphasis because it suggests just how deeply-rooted this tradition was prior to the war. Not only did a majority of Muslims and Croats refuse to participate in the violence being perpetrated by a small number of their co-nationals against Serbs in the region; more than few, at serious risk to their own safety, took steps to save their Serb neighbors.

The mass killing of Serbs that the Ustashas committed caused Serb survivors to begin an armed insurgency in order to save their lives and take revenge. Aside from these basic desires, little common ideological ground united these predominately peasant fighters. A minority, who were led mostly by the small number of Communists in the region, sought to fight and defeat the Ustashas and to liberate their lands from foreign
occupiers; yet they had little to no desire to harm their innocent Croat and Muslim neighbors who were unconnected with the Ustashas. A larger number, composed of embittered and sometimes chauvinistic peasants, and led by former soldiers of the Yugoslav army and local gendarmes, also sought to defeat the Ustashas and achieve national liberation; yet they held hatred for all Croats and Muslims, and wished to exact vengeance against them and plunder their property. The Ustasha mass killings had led them to collectively categorize all Croats and Muslims as Ustahas. While perhaps an illogical position given the small numbers of Ustahas in the region who actually perpetrated violence against Serbs, the unprecedented mass killing nevertheless brought about the rapid crystallization of the psychological construction of “the other” as enemy. In short, because some Croats and Muslims had joined the Ustahas and committed killings of Serbs, now all Croats and Muslims had quickly become the enemy. This reaction must be understood in the context of the ongoing mass violence against the region’s Serb population during the summer of 1941. As James Waller has written in attempting to explain what leads ordinary individuals to engage in acts of mass killing: “the normal reaction to an abnormal situation is abnormal behavior; indeed, normal behavior would be an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation.”

Collective categorization of former neighbors as the enemy, and a desire to exact vengeance against them all, was perhaps the disturbingly “normal reaction” by many Serbs to the unprecedented “abnormal situation” of the mass killings which the Ustahas committed.

When examined through the lens of the local community, the violence that the insurgents soon perpetrated against their former neighbors appears to have been driven less by any overarching ideological objective, and more by personal grievances,

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878 Waller, Becoming Evil, 271.
especially the desire for revenge and material gain. This does not mean that longer-term tensions and conflicts did not play a role in motivating some Serbs to take up arms against their Croat and Muslim neighbors. But, as was the case with the individuals who joined the Ustashas, it appears that situational factors—i.e., the war, the establishment of the NDH, and especially the Ustasha mass killings of Serbs—were of fundamental importance in causing the insurgents to perpetrate mass violence. Without these factors, it is unlikely that Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region would have committed mass killings of Croats and Muslims during the late summer of 1941.

The small number of Communist commanders in the region attempted to lead the insurgency, but the vast differences among the insurgents made them very difficult to control. The massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf of nearly 2,000 Muslim civilians vividly illustrated the grave weaknesses of the Communists in asserting authority over the insurgents during the early phase of the war. And yet, aside from the Serb fighters who carried out these mass killings, the Communists in the region had few others to rely upon to do the actual fighting against the Ustashas and occupying armies. Their dependence on these perpetrators of the massacres, and the eventual incorporation of many of them into the Partisan Movement, was a Faustian bargain struck because of the structural weaknesses of the Communists, namely, their low numbers and overall lack of authority over many of the insurgents. This set the stage for the second major paradox of the wartime period: the Communist-led Partisan Movement, which fought under the banner of the “Brotherhood and Unity” of all nationalities and sought to establish a multi-national socialist state, absorbed into its ranks sizable numbers of Serb insurgents who had murdered innocent Muslim civilians. In short, the Communists, who were
committed to multi-ethnic co-existence, relied on during the early phase of the war, and eventually assimilated, perpetrators of mass ethnic violence.

This wartime Faustian bargain—the Partisan Movement’s eventual absorption of many Serb insurgents who had murdered innocent Muslim civilians—lay at the heart of the silence that crystallized about the Muslims massacred in and around Kulen Vakuf. These mass killings called into question the mythical origins and heroic nature of the Partisan Movement which the Communist regime preached after the war. As the Partisan leadership acknowledged soon after the massacres, the victims were not Ustashas or their collaborators, but rather “innocent victims.” The Muslims whom the insurgents massacred therefore could not be categorized as “enemy losses.” There was no dilemma for the Communist regime about remaining silent about the wartime killings of civilians who had been associated with the Ustashas, or Chetniks or Nazis or any other of the occupying or collaborating armies. These individuals were considered “enemies” and had no place in the regime’s postwar categories of official civilian war victims. The massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf, however, were radically different for two reasons: first, the regime acknowledged that victims had been innocent civilians; second, many of their murderers had eventually become Partisans. Stories about the massacres thus were a reminder of the “darker” origins of the Communist-led insurgency. As such, they constituted a threat to the regime by suggesting that the insurgents who eventually became Partisans were not all champions of national equality and “Brotherhood and Unity”; rather, more than a few were revenge-seeking chauvinists who murdered and plundered their innocent Muslim neighbors. The past could not be changed, but the
The Communist regime could silence aspects of the war that were politically indigestible and which called into question its postwar legitimacy.

The first manifestation of the silence appeared even before the war ended, when the Communists decided not to conduct investigations into the mass killings of the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, despite having acquired a significant amount of information about the massacres. No investigations meant that no trials were conducted, and thus none of the insurgents were ever held accountable for the mass killings. This forced Muslim survivors to encounter unpunished Serb perpetrators on a regular basis during the postwar years. These interactions, which included seeing more than a few perpetrators in positions of political and military authority, vividly demonstrated to the survivors that silence was the only acceptable form of communication about the killings. The silence was further reinforced by the regime’s apparent prohibition of exhuming and reburying the bodies of the Muslims who had been murdered. These policies, which did not officially acknowledge the existence of the Muslim victims, greatly contributed to cementing the popular wartime notion that the Kulen Vakuf region was an “Ustasha place,” and that those who the insurgents had murdered were Ustashes or their relatives. Taken together, these policies led to a first strange paradox of the postwar period: the Communist regime’s war remembrance policies, which in theory were officially aimed to be non-ethnic, were in practice profoundly skewed along ethnic lines, and specifically against Muslims. As such, the Communist objective of promoting national equality and “Brotherhood and Unity” through war remembrance was destined to remain elusive.

And yet, despite the imbalance of power on the side of the Communist regime, the silence that crystallized after the war in the Kulen Vakuf region was more complex than
simply what the politically strong chose to impose on the weak. The Muslim survivors contributed in significant ways to the creation and enforcement of the silence, despite simultaneously “being silenced” by the authorities and the perpetrators of the massacres. Living in the aftermath of the mass killings with deep traumas compelled many to believe that speaking publicly about their experiences would only conjure up horrible memories. For them, silence about the massacres was preferable to speaking because verbalizing their traumatic memories had to the potential to open deep psychological and emotional wounds. More than a few saw no use in recounting such painful episodes from the past, when rebuilding their lives and communities in the present was such a pressing task. Interlocking with such personal aversions to speaking about the killings were real fears as to how their stories might cause problems with the authorities and their Serb neighbors. These were central reasons that compelled some of the survivors to remain silent. While partially the product of political repression, such decisions should also be seen as the exercise of power in pursuit of survival and self-preservation in the aftermath of extreme trauma and in the context of a hostile political environment.

Others survivors, especially those who eventually joined the Communist Party, felt that discussing the massacres would contribute nothing positive to the cultivation of “Brotherhood and Unity” and economic development. For them, promoting positive national relations in the present and rebuilding their war-torn region was what needed to be done—not recounting stories of the September massacres. These too were ways in

which survivors contributed to the creation of the silence about the mass killings. All of these findings suggest that silence in the shadow of mass violence is not simply something that the powerful impose on the weak; rather, the complicity and active participation of many groups—including both the politically strong and weak—is necessary in order to bring about the unspoken agreement not to speak about past events.

During the decades after the war, various groups contributed to policing and enforcing the multi-faceted culture of silence. The Communist regime’s vastly different approach to commemorating the murder of Serb civilian victims during the war, which included their official acknowledgement, frequent exhumation and reburial of their remains, as well as monument building, was one way that the regime continuously reinforced the silence. Serb “Victims of Fascism” in the Kulen Vakuf region could be publicly mourned and remembered because fascists could be identified as their murderers; the Muslim victims could not because many of their murderers had become Partisans. The zeal with which the Communist regime enforced this distinction was most vivid in its labeling of Muslims as “chauvinists” who protested that while monuments could be built for Serb civilian victims, nothing could be done for the victims of the September massacres. In doing so, the authorities demonstrated that they had no qualms about selectively discarding their sacrosanct principles of “Brotherhood and Unity” and national equality. In the end, upholding these ideals was apparently less important than maintaining the silence about mass killings in and around Kulen Vakuf in order to protect the legacy of the Partisan Movement.

As the postwar years passed, more and more Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region, particularly those who became members of the League of Communists, internalized the
culture of silence and became implicated in perpetuating it. With the chance to play an increasing role in the reconstruction and economic expansion of their region, along with their rising demographic and political profile, a number of these individuals acted to police the silence. Although most had lost relatives and neighbors in the massacres, on several occasions they quickly reacted when anyone would speak out about the need to publicly remember the victims of the September massacres. In doing so they exemplified a second strange paradox of the postwar period: a number of Muslims who had once “been silenced” did not react by resisting, but rather transformed over time into those who actively sought to silence others. As was the case with the creation of the silence, this dynamic suggests that successfully enforcing silence after mass violence requires the complicity of many social groups, and perhaps even the eventual metamorphosis of some of “the silenced” into agents involved in policing the silence.

In the case of Kulen Vakuf, however, the emergence and necessity of such a group highlights an important weakness of the silence: despite its rigorous enforcement, many people still tenaciously held on to their memories of the massacres in the private sphere. Parents told stories of the killings to their children; some of the elderly attempted to visit the sites where their sons had been murdered; some grandchildren traveled the pits where the bodies of their grandparents had been thrown; a veterinarian prayed each year for the victims at the edge of a dark cave full of their remains; an idealistic member of the League Communist Youth wrote letters and petitions for a monument to be built; and people gathered and cried together when the occasional song was sung late at night which triggered their memories of relatives and neighbors who had been massacred. In spite of the multi-faceted culture of silence, which the Communist regime, as well as
perpetrators and more than a few survivors built and enforced, the case of Kulen Vakuf suggests a stubborn capacity in people to remember traumatic events and loved ones lost—in spite of a political context hostile to such acts. While many worked with great vigilance to maintain the silence in the public sphere, others told stories behind closed doors and in doing so ensured that the public silence did not result in private forgetting.

And yet, these private acts of remembrance ultimately did not cause any significant erosion to the public silence. Public discussion of the massacres posed a serious threat to the Communist regime. So long as it based much of its postwar legitimacy on the Partisan Movement’s victory in the war, the silence would have to be maintained. Had this base of legitimacy faded in importance, along with the imperative to uphold the ideals of national equality and “Brotherhood and Unity,” the silence, most likely, would have eroded over time. But since the massacres brought into sharp focus the “dark side” of the Partisan Movement’s origins in the Kulen Vakuf region, breaking the silence would have been akin to discarding, or at least seriously damaging, the foundational myth of the Partisans. Such an act would have been a form of political suicide for the Communist regime, and thus the silence never eroded in any serious way while the regime stayed in power. This suggests that a breakdown of silence is not inevitable. If a certain constellation of political, social, and psychological factors is compelling to a sizable number of people, particularly among a society’s most powerful members, silence, most likely, can be maintained indefinitely.

As a counterpoint, the overall silence of Holocaust survivors in Israel between the end of the Second World War and the Eichmann trial in 1961 is instructive. Like the survivors of the September massacres in the Ljutoč valley, many Holocaust survivors
chose to remain silent about their wartime experiences, and instead focused on rebuilding their shattered lives in Palestine and, after 1948, in the newly founded State of Israel.\textsuperscript{880} Their silence was reinforced by much of Israeli society and especially the government, which saw in the survivors “chapters in Jewish history that would have hindered its constituting effort and contradicted the state’s narrative of power and revival.”\textsuperscript{881} Yet by 1960, David Ben Gurion (the first Prime Minister of Israel) chose to break the public silence about the Holocaust through the Eichmann trial. According to Idith Zertal, his main task was to use the trial to build national unity after an intense decade of state building in an exceptionally hostile geopolitical environment. The survivors of the Holocaust were now brought out to testify in a courtroom as a way to create new a discourse of Jewish power. Jews were no longer “sheep to be slaughtered;” rather, Jewish blood would be avenged, and this message was meant to be heard not only by past enemies, but especially by those in the present, that is, in the Arab world. The case of Holocaust survivors in Israel, while following a different dynamic than that of Muslim survivors in the Ljutoč valley, nonetheless shows that politically-constructed silences do not merely “erode” or “break down” with the passage of time. Rather, it appears to be of critical importance that the holders of political power make the decision that breaking the silence about past violence is in their present-day political interests. This was certainly the case in Israel in the early 1960s. During the first two decades after the Second World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the prospect of breaking the silence about Muslim


\textsuperscript{881} Idith Zertal, “From the People’s Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear, and War,” \textit{Representations}, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering (Winter, 2000), 101.
civilians war victims was not only painful and difficult for survivors of mass killings; it was a political threat of the first order to the Communist regime and therefore remained untouched.

The silence about the Muslim civilian victims from the Ljutoč valley did not crystallize and last for decades because of supposed anti-Muslim attitudes among some members of the Communist Party, as some Bosniak scholars have directly and indirectly suggested. Nor was it a result of the so-called policy of “de-ethnicizing” the remembrance of all war victims, as most foreign-based researchers have claimed. And it did not come about because the Muslim civilian victims happened to have been “on the wrong side,” as most were on no side during the war. Rather, as this dissertation has argued, the roots of the silence must be sought in the analysis of the specific dynamics of wartime mass violence at the local level. The case of Kulen Vakuf reveals that the primary cause of the postwar silence about Muslims murdered by Serb insurgents in that region was the eventual absorption by the Communist-led Partisan Movement of many of the perpetrators of the massacres.

This was a wartime dynamic specific to the Kulen Vakuf region. In the other areas that the 1986 SUBNOR report indicated as lacking monuments for Muslim civilian victims, such as Herzegovina and eastern Bosnia, many of the perpetrators had been Serb Chetnik fighters. More research at the local level would be required to determine the precise reasons for the postwar silence about the Muslim victims in these regions where Chetniks were mainly responsible for the mass killings. However, preliminary evidence suggests that this dissertation’s findings regarding the case of Kulen Vakuf may have more general applicability to other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina where massacres
of Muslims took place. In eastern Bosnia, for example, it appears that more than a few Serb Chetniks, who murdered Muslims in the first several years of the war, eventually joined the Partisans, with some ending up staffing the Communist regime. 882 In other instances, some Chetniks appear to have been insulated from suffering consequences of the wartime massacres they carried out against Muslims because of protection offered by their Serb relatives who had been Partisans. In the postwar period in the Foča region, for example, Serbs who staffed the Communist regime appear in some instances to have shied away from investigating war crimes committed by fellow Serbs who had been Chetniks during the war. 883 Others appear to have not reacted to Serbs who threatened Muslims who, they believed, wished to press the authorities to prosecute Chetniks for having carried out mass killings. And it appears that many Muslim survivors in eastern Bosnia, like those in the Kulen Vakuf region, were fearful of what consequences would ensue if they spoke out about the mass killings of their relatives and neighbors. 884 Such evidence suggests that the reasons for the emergence of the silence about Muslim victims—especially the absorption by the Communist-led Partisan Movement of Serb fighters who had murdered Muslim civilians—had some general characteristics that may have been common throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Whatever regional variations may have existed, the postwar silence about Muslim civilian victims vividly illustrates a key dilemma faced by the Communist regime when it

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882 See, for example, ABiH, Fond CK SK BiH, kut. 294, Izvještaj instruktora sa terena, Srez Goražde, 1948, 1.

883 See, for example, Arhiv Republice Srpske (ARS), Područna jedinica Foča (PJF), Fond Opštinski komitet (OK) Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine (SK BiH) Foča, kut. 3, Zapisnik OK SK Foča, 7 March 1963, 5; Ibid., kut. 9, Izvještaj o obilasku partiskih i masovnih organizacija na fočanskom srezu, 1952, 2.

came to its commitment to promoting national equality and “Brotherhood and Unity” through the remembrance of war victims. The silence could not be broken without simultaneously breaking apart the mythologized image of the Partisan Movement. However, the complex reality of wartime events, when filtered through postwar ideological imperatives, ultimately left the Communist regime tied in knots. The imperative to uphold “Brotherhood and Unity” required silence; and yet the silence violated in profound ways the essence of “Brotherhood and Unity.” With the Communist regime’s fate intimately tied to maintaining a mythologized portrait of the Partisan Movement, there was no way to resolve these contradictions.

And so, in the four decades that followed the Second World War, the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley were consigned to an existence similar to a small village in eastern Bosnia that Ivo Andrić once described in his famous novel The Bridge on the Drina: “Surrounded and shut in on all sides by steep hills, the greater part of the day it was in shadow and in silence…” The “steep hills” that silenced the inhabitants of the Ljutoč valley originally arose because of the wartime Faustian bargain the Communists made by absorbing Serb insurgents guilty of murdering innocent Muslims into their ranks. Over time, many of the Muslim survivors and their children in the region contributed to building these hills even higher. There were brief moments when, through the telling of private stories, sunlight would reach the dark and quiet place that so many worked to create and maintain in order to wall off the memories of the September massacres from disrupting the present and future. Life slowly renewed in the Ljutoč valley under the stewardship of the Communist regime, at first staffed overwhelmingly by Serbs, and later

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by increasing numbers of Muslims. Sealing off public discussion and remembrance of the mass killings, while rigorously promoting “Brotherhood and Unity,” were the two contradictory, yet essential components of the regime’s efforts to manage the politically indigestible wartime past. The price that the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley paid for this contradiction was an existence, like the inhabitants of the village surrounded by steep hills in Andrić’s novel, “in shadow and in silence.”
Epilogue:

The End of Silence and the Outbreak of War

As long as the League of Communists retained its position as the unchallenged political leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the silences created after World War Two about politically-indigestible wartime atrocities would remain, more or less, unquestioned. Yet already by the time the monument for “Fallen Fighters” was unveiled in Kulen Vakuf in November 1981, fissures were slowly opening in the League. President Tito’s death in 1980 deprived all of Yugoslavia of the only individual capable of balancing tensions and enforcing consensus among the country’s increasingly nationalistic political elite. And, by the early 1980s, national conflicts were not merely limited to the elite level; for example, in the autonomous province of Kosovo, large-scale demonstrations in 1981 of Albanians seeking increased political autonomy triggered harsh repression by Serb police. Serbs in Kosovo responded during the mid 1980s by organizing their own protests against perceived Albanian oppression and discrimination. Such events had a destabilizing effect across Yugoslavia. In the years that followed, disputes over the constitution of the country, particularly regarding the issue of centralization versus confederalization, emerged as the key issue underpinning these struggles. Serb intellectual and political elites began to voice calls for revision of the federal constitution in order to assert control over the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina, and especially Kosovo, which they felt belonged under the direct authority of Serbia. Their counterparts, particularly in Slovenia and Croatia, opposed such demands, as they felt
Serb-led centralization would infringe on their capacity to exercise autonomy in the Yugoslav federation.886

The political leadership and population of Bosnia and Herzegovina were slowly swept up into these Yugoslav-wide conflicts. For the Bosnian Serbs, who had spent much of the postwar period enjoying their unofficial position as “first among equals” in Bosnia, their shrinking population and declining share of the political leadership in the republic led many to look increasingly during the second half of the 1980s to Serbia for leadership.887 The Muslims were slowly displacing them at home. Their higher birthrate and increased political profile, due in large part to their official recognition as a constituent nation of the republic which guaranteed them a share of all political positions, resulted in their acquiring a growing share of power in the republic. This led to a mounting sense among many Bosnian Serbs, particularly among the educated and political elite, of being marginalized vis-à-vis their Muslim counterparts. By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, this would ultimately result in a sizable number of Bosnian Serbs joining forces with the political leadership of Serbia in waging an all-out attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina and a complete rejection of remaining part of its multi-national community.

During the early 1980s, however, these ominous changes in the broad political landscape were hardly noticeable in the everyday life of the Kulen Vakuf region. Local residents of the Ljutoč valley continued their efforts to improve the infrastructure of their

886 On these disputes, see Dragović-Soso, 115-161, 195-205; see also Veljko Vujačić, “Institutional Origins of Contemporary Serbian Nationalism,” *East European Constitutional Review*, 5, 4 (Fall 1996), 51-61.

887 Between 1970 and 1984 the percentage of Serbs in the members of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina shrank from 54.6 percent to 42.1 percent, while the Muslim share rose from 27.8 percent to 34.6 percent. The percentage of Croats remained stable at around 11 percent. On these figures, and on the claim regarding the Bosnian Serbs being “first among equals” in the republic, see Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 331.
towns and villages, building in Kulen Vakuf a pharmacy, bank, and new telephone lines. And, as had always been the case, they pooled their resources whenever seasonal floods from the Una River threatened their homes and livelihoods. Serb, Muslim, and Croat neighbors continued to work together and socialize with one another in cafes and taverns, with most apparently unconcerned in their everyday affairs with each other’s nationality or the news of elite-level national conflict. Interviews with residents in the Kulen Vakuf region suggest that the early to mid 1980s were not a time of mounting ethnic polarization at the local level. The contemporary press appeared to confirm this view, reporting that, as late as 1989, individuals of different nationalities living in the wider Bihać region continued to get along well. It was reported that this “Brotherhood and Unity” was best exemplified by the fact that many neighbors of different nationalities frequently gave contributions for the construction of each other’s churches and mosques. Local and regional manifestations of war remembrance also showed no sign that the overarching political landscape was destabilizing and fracturing along national lines. Commemorations continued every year at all memorial sites in the usual way, with the standard emphasis on promoting and protecting the “Brotherhood and Unity” of Serbs, Muslims, Croats, and others.


889 This retrospective interpretation, of course, may be colored by the exceptional period of violence that began in the region in 1992. It is possible that, after having survived the most recent war, some interviewees now have a tendency to idealize the peace and harmony of the years before the outbreak of war, and to downplay any signs that tensions may have been rising.

Yet beneath the surface of public rhetoric and official commemoration, changes of serious consequence with regard to the remembrance of war victims were taking place. In 1983, the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the Central Committee of the League of Communists, ordered SUBNOR to carry out a large-scale investigation of the sites where civilians had been murdered during the war. In addition to determining the location of the sites, how many victims were killed at each, and whether monuments had been built, this was the first time that the authorities ordered that civilian war victims be counted according to their nationality. Part of the stated reason for the investigation was simply to obtain this previously unknown information in time for the fortieth anniversary marking the end of the war which was to be celebrated in 1985. But other reasons existed which suggested how the increasingly unstable and nationalistic political context compelled the Communist regime to order a vast investigative project of wartime massacre sites almost four decades after 1945.

According to SUBNOR documents, so-called “political opponents” were beginning to build monuments for civilian war victims which the Communist regime had ignored for years, or had at least started to publicly speak about previously taboo sites of mass killing. These individuals were said to be “using these bones [of the victims] as their political capital.”892 While the political situation increasingly destabilized during the 1980s, some individuals took advantage of the more open atmosphere to break the silences about certain civilian war victims whom the Communist regime had previously


892 ABiH, Fond SUBNOR BiH, Pregled stratišta i žrtava terora u Bosni i Hercegovini, September 1985, 4.
consigned to total forgetting. According to the SUBNOR report, the decades-long silence about a number of wartime massacres had ultimately played into the hands of “chauvinists” and “nationalists.” While the Communist regime remained silent, others had advanced their own interpretation of wartime events. In so doing, they had actively promoted “nationalism” and “chauvinism,” while damaging “Brotherhood and Unity.”

A prime example of this dynamic was the longstanding myth that the Kulen Vakuf region had been an “Ustasha place” and that the Muslims of the Ljutoč valley had all been Ustaschas during the war. With the Communist regime unwilling to break the silence about the September massacres because of the imperative to preserve the heroic legacy of the Partisan Movement, for years, others had collectively categorized the innocent Muslim civilian victims as “Ustashas.” In effect, they had villianized the Muslims while simultaneously blaming them for their own murders. By acknowledging that official silence about certain mass killings had played a role in allowing such interpretations to fester, the SUBNOR report recognized the serious political ramifications of remaining silent about wartime atrocities, such as those which occurred in Kulen Vakuf. Moreover, with regard to the existence of the overall silence about most Muslim civilian war victims, as exemplified in the fact that the vast majority of their massacre sites remained unmarked with monuments, the report included a surprisingly candid self-criticism and recommended a serious change in policy: “We still don’t have

the political bravery to tell the truth to the people. It is time to tell people about the tens of thousands of Muslims who we lost in the first days of the war.\textsuperscript{894}

It was in this context, which saw increased official interest in acknowledging the previously taboo mass killings of Muslim civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina that certain individuals took the initiative to speak publicly about the massacres in Kulen Vakuf. The first to do so appears to have been Esad Bibanović, a former member of the Communist Party in Kulen Vakuf, and one of the three Muslims who remained in the town on 6 September 1941 when it fell to the insurgents. Bibanović was not only a witness to wartime events, but had also spent many years quietly researching the mass killings which had occurred in his home region. The forum in which he spoke was a conference on the history of the Communist Party in the Bihać region held in the city of Bihać in October 1986. Exemplifying the changing political climate, Bibanović, whose previous requests to publish his work on the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf had always been denied, was invited to speak at the conference. Apparently several key political personalities in the region, including leading members of the League of Communists and several influential members of the State Security Service [\textit{Služba državne bezbjednosti}], had now decided to back him.

Bibanović’s speech in Bihać, which appears to have been the first occasion when the broad outlines of the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf were publicly discussed, finally broke the taboo about mentioning the mass killings. While he later referred to his comments, and subsequent published article, as a somewhat “air-brushed” version of what had actually taken place in September 1941, he nonetheless unequivocally stated

\textsuperscript{894} Ibid., Obrazloženje tabele, undated document, most likely June 1985, 6.
that the Muslim victims had been innocent civilians—and therefore were not Ustashas—and that those who killed them had been Serb insurgents.\textsuperscript{895} The subsequent publication of Bibanović’s article in 1987, on which his speech was based, was followed during the same year by a short monograph by Milan Vukmanović on Ustasha crimes in the Bihać region in 1941. While largely devoted to describing Ustasha crimes against Serbs, he nonetheless also contributed to breaking the silence about the Muslim victims in Kulen Vakuf by provocatively referring to the massacres as “genocide.”\textsuperscript{896}

Three years later, in 1990, the scholars Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić caused something of a sensation with a book that not only further broke the silence about the Muslim victims in the Kulen Vakuf region, but also about many other killings of Muslim civilians which occurred during the war throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and the rest of Yugoslavia. Their enormous document collection, \textit{The Genocide Against the Muslims [Genocid nad Muslimanima]}, which was part of a larger project on wartime atrocities under the direction of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, provided the Bosnian and Yugoslav public with a vast number of testimonies and other documents on the murder of Muslim civilians during the years 1941-1945.\textsuperscript{897} This was the first time in the history of post-World War II Yugoslavia that such a volume had been published. The impact of the previous decades of official silence could be clearly seen in the way that

\textsuperscript{895} For Bibanović’s article, see “Kulenvukufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku,” 419-466. On the conference in Bihać, see \textit{Krajina}, “U Bihaću završen naučni skup o radu bihačke partijske organizacije od 1919-1945. godine. Uvijek u kontinuitetu revolucije,” 17 October 1986, 1-3. It is telling that this long report on the conference briefly mentions nearly every speech, but not the one given by Bibanović. In spite of the changing political context, and the fact that Bibanović had delivered a public speech, it appears that the authorities were nevertheless still somewhat apprehensive about discussing the massacres in Kulen Vakuf in a regional newspaper.

\textsuperscript{896} Vukmanović, \textit{Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine}, 130.

\textsuperscript{897} Dedijer and Miletić, \textit{Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941-1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja}. 

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Dedijer and Miletić were forced to collect many of their documents. Since the Communist regime had not bothered to investigate many of the war crimes committed against Muslim civilians during the war, the two researchers resorted to placing advertisements in Bosnian newspapers (e.g., the largest Bosnian daily *Oslobodenje* [Liberation]) in which they asked Muslim survivors to write and submit testimonies. They received a flood of responses from survivors of wartime massacres who had previously kept quiet about their experiences. Perhaps the most important contribution of the document collection was to show that most Muslim civilian victims were not killed in concentration camps or in military operations, but rather were murdered in their homes, in pits, and on bridges or banks of rivers. Those who committed the vast majority of the killings—Serb insurgents and Chetniks—had frequently been the neighbors of the victims before the war. The mass murder of Muslim civilians was therefore very much a local and intimate affair, triggered in part by outside forces and events, but carried out almost exclusively by domestic actors who often knew the victims.898

The public revelations about the widespread mass killings of Muslim civilians during the war, which some scholars increasingly referred to as “genocide,” opened even more space for the discussion of particular massacres, among them those which occurred in Kulen Vakuf. In September 1990, following the implosion of the League of Communists in January of that year, and the subsequent creation of political pluralism, Muslims of the newly formed Party of Democratic Action [*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA] held the first ever commemoration in Kulen Vakuf for the victims of the 1941

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898 For a contemporary review of the book, see Mustaфа Imamović, Prikaz knjige „Genocid nad Muslimanima” Vladimir Dedijer i Antun Miletic (Svjetlost: Sarajevo, 1990), in *Ogledalo*, Godina 1, broj 2, prosinac/decembar 1990, 62.
massacres. As a sign of national reconciliation between Serbs and Muslims, they went to the old Orthodox Church in Kulen Vakuf, after saying prayers for the Muslim victims, and laid a wreath in memory of the Serb victims.\footnote{999} It appears that some Muslims insisted on explicitly emphasizing the ethnic dimensions of the wartime mass killings in order to correct the imbalance that had existed since 1945 between Serb and Muslim victims. As one man stated in a letter to the regional newspaper \textit{Krajina}:\footnote{999} 

\begin{quote}
Innocent people were killed [during the war] on many bridges. There are monument plaques which bear witness to this. For example, next to the bridge in Bosanska Krupa is a monument which tells us about the terrible suffering of innocent Serbs from fascist terror. But there are bridges in Foča, in Goražde, in Višegrad [all located in eastern Bosnia], and in Kulen Vakuf where innocent Muslims were killed and there are no monument plaques or even monuments. Were they [the Muslims] affirmed if the largest sites where they were murdered do not contain a single letter about their suffering? It was only this year, after fifty years, that Muslims succeeded in performing funeral rites for the innocent Muslims who were killed...\footnote{900}
\end{quote}

These commemorative activities, and discussions surrounding their enactment, were notable for the fact that they did not include calls for revenge against Serbs. On the contrary, as was the case in Kulen Vakuf, the commemoration for Muslim victims was carried out with a concurrent ceremony for Serb victims of the Ustashas. The rediscovery of the mass killing of Muslim victims was not used by Muslim political elites or others as a basis for fomenting national conflict. What appears to have been most important for those involved in the commemorations was to finally engage in public acts of remembrance for Muslim civilian victims—not to use such acts to stir up national tensions.

Throughout the rest of 1990 and 1991, efforts to break the silence about the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf continued. In December 1990, an interview with

\footnote{999} \textit{Krajina}, “SDA u Kulen Vakufu odala počast žrtvama. U znak nacionalnog pomirenja,” 21 September 1990, 1.

\footnote{900} Ibid., „Istina i poruka parola na mostu,“ 28 December 1990 and 4 January 1991, 11.
Mujo Dervišević, the sole survivor of the massacre at the Golubnjača pit, was published in the Zagreb-based magazine *Ogledalo* [The Mirror].  

His testimony was the first ever published from a survivor of the killings. And the following year, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the massacres in Kulen Vukuf on 6 September 1991, the historian Safet Bandžović published a short newspaper article provocatively entitled “The Crimes of the Insurgents.” This brief narrative reconstruction of the massacres in and around Kulen Vukuf gave a general overview of the killings and, moreover, was the first account ever published in a newspaper. Taken together, all of these scholarly and popular publications, as well as commemorative activities, contributed to definitively breaking the decades-long public silence not only about the mass killings of Muslims from the Ljutoč valley, but also that which had existed for tens of thousands of other Muslim civilians murdered throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina during the years 1941-1945.

Had all these revelations taken place in a stable political context, they might have had an impact on changing popular perceptions of what took place during the war, and specifically the stereotype that the Muslim victims had been Ustashas, or their supporters. The newly available documentation, the survivor testimonies, the beginnings of historical research into the mass killing of Muslim civilians, and the commemorative activities—all these elements might have convinced the Yugoslav public that these victims were just as innocent as other civilians who were murdered in large numbers during the war, such as Serbs and Jews. But the mounting political disintegration of the Yugoslav federation had

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901 See the testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Ibrahim Kajan, “Pakao Vukuf Golubnjača.” *Ogledalo*, Godina 1, Broj 2, prosinac/decembar 1990, 26-27.

outpaced the breaking of the silence surrounding the mass murder of innocent Muslim civilians. This was not by chance. Given the intimate connection between maintaining the silence and protecting the legacy of the Partisan Movement, which had absorbed many insurgents and Chetniks guilty of murdering Muslim civilians, the erosion of the authority of the League of Communists was a prerequisite for the breaking of the silence about the wartime mass killing of Muslims.

The disintegration of the League had its origins in the attempt by the political leadership of the Republic of Serbia, by September 1987 under the authority of Slobodan Milošević, to aggressively recentralize the Yugoslav federation under Serb dominance. Milošević relied on the direct mobilization of Serb masses to bring down his political opponents in the provinces of Kosovo, Vojvodina, and the Republic of Montenegro by 1989. But multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina presented a problem. High-level Muslim Communists in the republic, such as Hamdija Pozderac, who was vice president of Yugoslavia in 1987, and who was set to assume the position of chairman of the rotating Yugoslav presidency in 1988, and thus would play a major role in any revision to the country’s constitution, were unsupportive of the Serb program of centralization. In response, it appears that political elites in Serbia, along with their allies, manufactured a major financial scandal in 1987 surrounding the Agrokomerc enterprise in northwestern Bosnia which implicated Pozderac, as well as several other important Muslim political personalities, in illegal practices. This led to their downfall and set the stage for a Serb attempt to assert control over Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁹⁰³

The aggressive stance of Milošević and his allies ultimately led to the implosion of the League of Communists in January 1990. Political pluralism soon followed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most powerful of the newly created political parties were all organized along national lines, and included the (Muslim) Party of Democratic Action [*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA], the Serbian Democratic Party [*Srpska demokratska stranka*, SDS], and the Croatian Democratic Union [*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ]. When these parties campaigned for the first time in 1990, none of them did so under the banner of seeking the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the establishment of ethnic units within the republic. But the political situation rapidly changed in 1991 when first Slovenia, then Croatia, and finally Macedonia declared independence. The rapid disintegration of the Yugoslav federation left open the question of whether or not Bosnia and Herzegovina’s political elite would decide to remain part of Yugoslavia or declare independence. The vast majority of the Muslim and Croat political leadership in the republic preferred an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina to one dominated by Serbia in a rump Yugoslavia. The bulk of the Bosnian Serb leadership, by contrast, could only conceive of a future existence in multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina if it was still attached to the Yugoslav federation and thus linked to Serbia, as well as to Serbs in other republics. Their main fear concerned the Muslims. As the largest population in Bosnia and Herzegovina by 1991, the Muslims were guaranteed to displace the Bosnian Serbs as “first among equals” in a future independent state.

Once it became clear during 1991 that the political leadership of Muslims and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina were committed to declaring independence from Yugoslavia, most of the Bosnian Serb political elite rapidly abandoned the idea of
remaining part of a future independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. For them, the Serbs in Bosnia now needed to “leave [the republic] and become a special federal unit of a new Yugoslavia (or of a union of Serbian lands).”\textsuperscript{904} On 9 January 1992, the Bosnian Serb political leadership formally proclaimed the “Serb Republic” [\textit{Republika srpska}] of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and proceeded to establish a separate Ministry of Internal Affairs. All Bosnian Serb policemen were asked to leave the common Bosnian Ministry and join the new Serb one. Such radical and unilateral measures, designed to establish an exclusively Serb entity in areas of the republic which contained large non-Serb populations, could only be realized through large-scale violence.\textsuperscript{905} The Bosnian Serb leadership had the political and military backing of the Milošević regime in Belgrade to carry out what would amount the secession from, and then attack on, the newly sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Republic of Serbia not only assisted in arming the Bosnian Serbs, which began already during 1991, but also simultaneously dismantled the Territorial Defense units of the Yugoslav People’s Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This meant that when the Bosnian Serb attack commenced, the Muslims and Croats would be more or less defenseless in the face of the Serb conquest of their lands. As was the case with the German invasion in 1941, the involvement of outside elements—in 1992, the Republic of Serbia under Milošević—was crucial to destabilizing the internal order in Bosnia and Herzegovina and setting the stage for war.

\textsuperscript{904} This quotation comes from a document captured by the Fifth Corpus of the Army of the Republic Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Bosnian Serb Army. It was made available by a former officer of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. See Arhiv 5. korpusa, Bosanka Krajina. Konstitutivni činilac nove jugoslovenske federacije, 31 December 1991, 7.

\textsuperscript{905} Hoare, \textit{The History of Bosnia}, 353-354.
In the Bihać region, it was not until March of 1992 that Serb policemen abandoned their positions as members of the Bosnian Ministry of Internal Affairs and joined the newly formed “Station of Public Security” [Stanice javne bezbjednosti], composed exclusively of Serbs.\(^{906}\) Documents written by some of the Serbs who formed these new police units reveal how their perceptions of the contemporary political situation were informed by stereotypes dating back to the mass killing of the Second World War. These Serbs did not refer to their main rivals for political power in Bosnia and Herzegovina as “Muslims” or even “members of the SDA,” which was the main Muslim political party. Rather, they invoked a label that had its origins in 1941 and which had festered during the ensuing decades due in large part to the former Communist regime’s refusal to break the silence about the mass killing of Muslim civilians during the war. As Serb police in the Bihać region noted when explaining why the decision was taken during the spring of 1991 to organize exclusively Serb units in the preparation for war: “The Serb people instinctively felt the danger from Ustashism [ustaštvo] and began to organize. The most important conclusion was for the Serb people to organize for self-defense, and to prepare to acquire arms for that purpose.”\(^{907}\) If members of the newly-formed Serb police units now viewed their Muslim neighbors as the embodiment of “Ustashism,” then it followed that violence would be the only means through which to deal with them.

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\(^{906}\) Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove, Centar službe bezbjednosti Bihać, Podaci koji se odnose na učešće radnika SJB Bihać na pripremama i organizaciji Srpskog naroda prije izbijanja ratnih sukoba, 13 October 1993, 4, document included as an appendix in Begić, Ljutočka dolino, nikad ne zaboravi, 210-217.

\(^{907}\) Ibid., 2.
Nearly fifty years had passed since the beginning of the Second World War in the Bihać region. The relatively small number of Muslims who had actually been Ustashas during the war had either passed away or were now elderly men. Yet in a period of acute political crisis, old ways of thinking rapidly resurfaced as a relevant way to make sense of the present. Part of what allowed the category “Ustasha” to be so easily applied to Muslims in 1992 was not simply that some Muslim Ustashas had in fact committed mass killings and other war crimes against Serbs during the years 1941-1945. It was also the Communist regime’s refusal while it was still firmly in power to deal openly with the complex wartime experience which resulted in mass murder of innocent Muslim civilians. The regime’s need to protect its own legitimacy, which meant that crimes committed by Serb insurgents and Chetniks who later joined the Partisans were not to be publicly discussed, had unintentionally contributed to the widespread myth that all Muslims had been Ustasha during the war.

The sudden shift from relatively harmonious national relations, at least at the level of everyday interaction, to the collective categorization of neighbors of a different nationality as enemies, had been a central feature of life in the region during the Second World War. This capacity to rapidly switch from one mindset to the other, and then back again, had also been a part of postwar life, especially in the aftermath of incidents which were, or were perceived to be, based in national conflict, including fights, murders, and especially any event which brought up tensions and traumas from the war. But during those decades the Communist regime had placed a priority on quickly responding to such incidents and punishing those responsible. Tensions would flare up, but the regime had always intervened and stopped the process of collective categorization before it spiraled
out of control. By 1992, the acute political crisis, and the meddling by outside forces (i.e., the Republic of Serbia), once again triggered the rapid and radical realignment of perceptions of former neighbors. But this occurred in a context in which many former Communists had transformed into nationalists. No sizable political force remained in power which could constrain the extremists who sought to portray former neighbors as enemies in order to use violence to redraw the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and remake its internal national composition.

As had been the case in 1941, Muslim neighbors, who Serbs had lived with in peace for nearly half a century, suddenly became “Ustashas,” especially during 1991-1992. During the Second World War, this perception that all Muslims were somehow Ustashas was used by many Serb fighters—including insurgents and Chetniks—as a justification for murdering innocent Muslim civilians. In 1992, the perception would be used once again as a pretext for perpetrating mass violence. But this time there were no actual “Ustashas” among the Muslims, and no massacres of Serbs had been committed which needed to be avenged. In 1992, the Bosnian Serb leadership, along with its sponsors in Belgrade, fanned the fear of the “Ustashas” in order to launch a murderous attack on their essentially unarmed Muslim neighbors. Their objective was to transform large swaths of territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina into ethnically-pure Serb lands. And the category “Ustasha,” which continued to have contemporary resonance due in large part to the former Communist regime’s refusal to confront the mass murder of Muslim civilians during the Second World War, was now used by the Bosnian Serb leadership fifty years later as a propaganda tool to mobilize its supporters for a new round of mass killing of Muslims.
The initial Serb aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina began in the eastern part of the country during March of 1992 in the towns of Bijeljina and Zvornik. This region, which was to comprise a crucial segment of the “Serb Republic,” was home to large numbers of Muslims. Paramilitaries and units of the Yugoslav People’s Army from Serbia (which was rapidly transformed from an all-Yugoslav to an all-Serbian force), along with local Bosnian Serb police forces and military units, attacked these towns and their neighboring villages. They rounded up the Muslim political and intellectual elite and executed them. Large numbers of other Muslim civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, suffered the same fate. The mass rape of Muslim women and extreme torture of male Muslim prisoners in concentration camps were also practices which the various Serb military and paramilitary units employed to further terrorize the Muslim population and put a definitive end to multi-national life. Those who remained alive after the Serb onslaught were forced to flee to areas of the country which the Bosnian Serb leadership did not envision as part of the Serb Republic. This process, which during the initial phases of the war came to be known in the media as “ethnic cleansing,” was repeated again and again throughout the spring of 1992 in the towns and villages of eastern Bosnia and, slightly later, in the Bosnian Krajina (northwestern Bosnia).  

The Bosnian Serb leadership had already begun preparing for war in the Bihać region during the second half of 1991, secretly distributing weapons to their supporters in the police force, who then armed others in the localities. At the same time, Serb radio

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908 On “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: the Policy of Ethnic Cleansing* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995).
stations engaged in relentless propaganda about how “the Turks” were preparing for war. During the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, the economy of the region came to a standstill due to the crisis and the imminent threat of war. By the early spring of 1992, stores in the Ljutoč valley had been practically empty for several months. On 18-19 May 1992, local Serb leaders carried out the “evacuation” of the entire Serb population of the city of Bihać as a final measure before commencing their attack on the region. The buses which the population of the Ljutoč valley used to travel each day to Bihać and back stopped running around this time. Passengers on one of the last buses remembered seeing Serbs setting up heavy artillery on the heights around the valley.

In spite of all these ominous developments—from the mass violence and ethnic cleansing in eastern Bosnia in March and April to the evacuation of Serbs from Bihać and the positioning of Serb weapons around the Ljutoč valley in May—many Muslims simply did not believe that war would break out in their region. Like the region’s Serb population in 1941, Muslims felt they had done nothing wrong and therefore could not see why anyone would wish to harm them.

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909 Ministarstvo za unutrašnje poslove, Centar službe bezbjednosti Bihać, Podaci koji se odnose na učešće radnika SJB Bihać na pripremama i organizaciji Srpskog naroda prije izbijanja ratnih sukoba, 13 October 1993, 2, document included as an appendix in Begić, Ljutočka dolino, nikad ne zaboravi, 210-217. Interviews with anonymous informants indicate that Serbs began distributing weapons to their co-nationals in the Kulen Vakuf region around this same.

910 Ibid., 40.

911 Ibid., 43. On how the mounting political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina paralyzed economic life in the Kulen Vakuf region during the months prior the outbreak of war, see also Krajina, “Juče i sutra u Kulen Vakufo.” 14 February 1992, 6.

912 Ibid., 21.

913 Ibid., 44.

914 Ibid., 37.
On 10 June 1992, a Muslim resident of the Ljutoč valley, Muhamed Hodžić, drove a pregnant neighbor to the hospital in Bihać to give birth. On his way to the city he passed through all Serb military checkpoints without incident. But on the way home Bosnian Serb police officers stopped him and then kidnapped him. He was blindfolded and taken to the headquarters of Colonel Đuro Karailović, the commander of the Serb military units which were positioned in the immediate vicinity of the Ljutoč valley. Hodžić was given a sheet of paper and pen and told to write down what Colonel Karailović was about to say. He was then to immediately take this document to the Muslim political leadership in the valley. The following is an excerpt of what Colonel Karailović said:

The whole population [of the Ljutoč valley] is to hand over its weapons and, if this is done, not a hair on anyone’s head will be harmed. The Serb people do not want war, but they must defend themselves, as the Croats and the Muslims are preparing for war. If as much as a single drop of Serbian blood is spilled, the Ljutoč valley will be burned, and everything in it will be destroyed and demolished so that it will not be known that anyone ever lived there. A delegation from the region should come to agree on the details of handing over all weapons. The delegation should come on 10 June 1992 at 5:00 PM. If this order is not obeyed, then the attack will commence.915

This ultimatum, like so many others that Serb military commanders issued to Muslim communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina during the spring of 1992, was the first step in carrying out the violent expulsion of the non-Serb population. Colonel Karailović’s portrayal of Croats and Muslims preparing for war, and Serbs desiring only peace, was essentially a projection of Serb actions on to the Croat and Muslim communities. At this point, the Muslims were essentially unarmed, while the Bosnian Serbs had enormous quantities of heavy weapons which, moreover, they had positioned around Muslim towns and villages. The need for Serb self-defense in the face of a supposed imminent Muslim

915 Ibid., 52.
attack was a fiction that Bosnian Serb military commanders used as a pretext for waging war against an essentially defenseless civilian population. The real reasons for the Serb ultimatum had to do with realizing the overarching Serbian objective of creating an ethnically-pure Serbian territory which would link up the Bihać region with territories already occupied by Serbs in the Republic of Croatia. The Ljutoč valley was a compact region populated almost exclusively by Muslims in the midst of a territory the Bosnian Serbs wanted in their Serb Republic. And among these Muslims were sizable numbers of military-age men who could be mobilized to fight against the Bosnian Serbs. For these reasons, the region was targeted for attack and the expulsion of the Muslim population.916

By 3:00 PM on 10 June, the vast majority of Muslims from Kulen Vakuf had begun to flee the town. They headed north towards the village of Klisa where, along with the residents of that village, they started crossing the Una in small boats on their way to Orašac. This was the exact reverse of the path which Muslims from Ćukovi, Orašac, and Klisa had taken when fleeing from the Serb insurgents in September 1941. As had been the case nearly fifty years before, the movement of people across the Una lasted until late in the night.917 The local Muslim political leadership, along with commanders of the police and their reserve units, had decided to gather the entire Muslim population of the valley in Orašac as a means of better resisting the Serbian attack.918 Three men were instructed to make their way across the border with the Republic of Croatia to the town of Donji Lapac in order to inform a contingent of French peacekeepers with the United


917 Begić, Ljutočka dolino, nikad ne zaboravi, 65.

918 Ibid., 62.
Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) that the Ljutoč valley was about to come under Serbian attack, and that without assistance the Muslim population was likely to be massacred. It appears that the peacekeepers agreed to meet the Muslims near the footbridge by the waterfalls on the Una River known as Štrbački buk. From there they would be taken under the protection of the UN and transported to UNPROFOR’s regional headquarters in Donji Lapac.  

Early on the morning of 11 June 1992, the Bosnian Serbs began shelling the Ljutoč valley. In response, thousands of Muslims hastily started making their way towards the Una River. The poorly-armed Muslim police units were no match for the Bosnian Serbs who quickly descended into the valley. When they entered Orašac they immediately executed a number of Muslims. Those who decided to remain in the village were brought to the local primary school where a number were tortured and then murdered. There was exceptional fear among all Muslims, but especially among the elderly who saw that a number of Serbs had large knives attached to their belts. This brought back their memories of the massacres they had survived in September 1941 when Serb insurgents used such weapons to murder their relatives and neighbors. The presence of the Second World War, and especially the notion that the Muslims of the valley were “Ustashas,” was exemplified in the comments of the Serbs who captured the remaining Muslim men in Orašac. One Muslim remembered that while being beaten by Serb soldiers as they brought him to the village school, several yelled out as they struck

919 Ibid., 63-64.
920 Ibid., 71.
921 Ibid., 141.
him: “Here’s the biggest Ustasha of all of them!” While the beatings and killings at the school took place, other Serbs, just like the insurgents a half-century earlier, plundered the village. They broke into stores and cleaned them out. Others drove away in Muslim cars. Still others slaughtered livestock they had stolen in order to “celebrate” their victory.

The Serbs quickly realized that the majority of the Muslims were fleeing towards Štrbački buk, and began making their way there to cut them off. On the afternoon of 11 June, three groups converged by the footbridge which spanned the Una River as it plunged over waterfalls: nearly three thousand Muslims, a large number of Bosnian Serb soldiers and police, and a contingent of French UN peacekeepers. On the Croatian side of the river the Bosnian Serbs were met by the UNPROFOR soldiers who told the Serbs that they intended to take the Muslims under their protection and transport them to Donji Lapac. The Serbs were visibly angry at the peacekeepers and began cursing them. They informed the French that they had lists of Muslim men whom they needed to interrogate. Contrary to their mandate, the peacekeepers decided to allow the Bosnian Serbs to carry out a detailed selection among the Muslim refugees. The reasons for this decision remain unknown.

The Muslims were made to cross the footbridge one at a time. Waiting for them at the end were Bosnian Serb soldiers who were searching for Muslims who had been active in the SDA (the main Muslim political party in Bosnia and Herzegovina) or who

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922 Testimony of Asim Behrem in Ibid., 120.
923 Ibid., 71.
924 Ibid., 106.
925 Ibid., 94-95.
were members of the local police and their reserves. The Serbs had already created precise lists of the men they wanted, which was a further indication of the premeditation of their attack and desire to expel the Muslim population from the Ljutoč valley. As the thousands of Muslims made their way one at a time to the other side of the bridge, the Serbs selected approximately 210 men and boys and led each away. Most were between the ages of sixteen and sixty. Witnesses testify to the exceptionally intimate nature of the selections. Among the Serbs present who assisted in determining which Muslims were to be taken were some who had worked as bus drivers on routes which passed through the Ljutoč valley. Others had been police officers. These were men who knew nearly all the local Muslims and had been friends with many before war. Some were even related to Muslim families as godfathers [kumovi]. If a Serb recognized a Muslim with whom he had been in any kind of personal dispute prior to 1992, then that individual was selected and taken away. A Muslim’s fate depended exclusively on the will of the Serbs standing at the end of the bridge. These selections lasted throughout the night of 11-12 June. The role of the UN peacekeepers was mixed. On one hand, given the behavior of the Bosnian Serbs in eastern Bosnia and other parts of the Bosnian Krajina, the presence of UNPROFOR units prevented what would most likely have been a large-scale massacre of the Muslim population of the Ljutoč valley. On the other, the peacekeepers inexplicably stood by while Serbs selected Muslim men and boys, which for many would prove to be a death sentence.

926 Ibid., 104, 80-81.

927 Ibid., 77-78, 81. It should be noted that while the Bosnian Serb forces were constrained by the presences of UNPROFOR forces in carrying out a massacre of the Muslims crossing the bridge, they did not shy away from robbing each individual of money, jewelry, and other valuables. See Ibid., 81-82.
43. The bridge over the Una River at Štrbački buk. The Muslims who crossed faced Bosnian Serb soldiers on the far side who selected men and boys to be taken to concentration camps and prisons. UN peacekeepers allowed such selections to take place without any protest. Source: Begić, Ljutočka dolina, nikad ne zaboravi, 81.

The Muslims who the Serbs selected were loaded on to trucks and taken away. One such transport stopped shortly thereafter in the Serbian village of Doljani. Local residents came out to see what was going on. Some congratulated the Serb soldiers, apparently calling them “Serb liberators” [srpski oslobodioci]. Elderly women brought out homemade wine. Some apparently said to the soldiers: “Where are you taking the balije [a derogatory word for Muslims]? Kill them.”928 Unlike in 1941, it appears that no Serbs intervened to save any of the Muslim prisoners. The transports made their way out of the valley and took the men and boys to a series of prisons and concentration camps in the vicinity of Bihać.929 As for the remaining several thousand Muslims who

928 Ibid., 105.
were not selected by the Bosnian Serb soldiers, UNPROFOR peacekeepers took them in their white trucks to their base in Donji Lapac. After being held there for few days, they were transported to Bihać where they began living as refugees in abandoned Serb apartments and houses.

A small number of Muslim women, children, and elderly remained in the Ljutoč valley after the Serb attack on 11 June. Serb police and soldiers limited their movements and forbade them from gathering together in groups. They were assaulted on a regular basis. During the second half of September, several Serb soldiers from the village of Rajinovci (located in the Kulen Vakuf region) were killed in a battle with members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 22 or 23 September, after the funeral of these soldiers, a group of Serbs descended into the Ljutoč valley in search of revenge. The remaining Muslims had been ordered to pick plums that day. The Serbs found them in the orchards and murdered everyone they could catch. Only a handful managed to escape.\footnote{Ibid., 144.} This massacre marked the end of Muslim life in the valley for the remainder of the war.

In the ensuing months, local Serbs, as well as others from the surrounding region, stripped all Muslim houses of everything of value and then demolished them. As had been the case in September 1941, the mosques in Ćukovi, Orašac, and Kulen Vakuf were completely destroyed. In Kulen Vakuf, Serbs had plans to create a new and completely Serbian town. After they cleared away the rubble which was left when they demolished the Sultan Ahmed mosque, they renamed the empty space “the Square of Serb Sisters” \([\text{Trg srpskih sestara}].\) Serbs also destroyed Muslim cemeteries, as well as village

\footnote{These included camps in Ripač, Prekaja, Kozila, Kamenica, and Račić.}

\footnote{Ibid., 144.}
primary schools. Such acts were taken in order to erase all traces that Muslims had lived in the Ljutoč valley. ⁹³¹

44. The space in Kulen Vakuf where the Sultan Ahmed mosque stood. Bosnian Serbs demolished this mosque, as well as the rest in the Ljutoč valley, during the months following their attack on the region and expulsion of its Muslim population. Source: Ljutočka dolina, nikad ne zaboravi, 140.

The Muslim men and boys, who on 11 June had been taken to prisons and concentration camps, were subjected to severe beatings during the weeks following the attack on the Ljutoč valley. Some of those who came to assault the Muslims had been their neighbors before the war. Others came to the prisons and camps specifically to “settle scores” with Muslims with whom they had long-standing disputes. One group of the men and boys were exchanged for Serb soldiers who members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had taken prisoner in battles during the summer of 1992. The Bosnian Serbs executed the rest. They dumped the bodies into the pits of Tihotin and Bezdan,

⁹³¹ Ibid., 89-91.
which were located near the town of Ripač (just outside Bihać). As was the case with the insurgents in 1941, who murdered Muslim men and boys at the Golubnjača pit, the Bosnian Serb executioners of 1992 chose these pits in order to hide all evidence of their crimes.932  The women of the Ljutoč valley, who were living as refugees in Bihać, continued for the next several years to demand that the local authorities and Red Cross arrange for the release of their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, not knowing that they had already been murdered.933  All told, it appears that approximately 371 Muslims from the Ljutoč valley were killed in the violence which began on 11 June 1992. Most were men between the ages of 20-40. They had been murdered during the initial Serb assault, executed in concentration camps, and killed during the ensuing years while fighting as soldiers with the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was not until the end of October 1994 that Muslims were able to contemplate returning to the Ljutoč valley. A successful large-scale attack by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as “Operation Grmeč 94,” succeeded in driving the Bosnian Serb Army out of Kulen Vakuf, as well as the rest of the nearby Muslim villages. During the first days of November 1994, Muslim soldiers entered the Ljutoč valley on foot and, aside from a battle at the Serbian village of Rajinovci, they encountered hardly any resistance. Most of the Serbs who had driven them out of their homes in 1992 had fled without firing a shot. The only sounds of gunfire that could be heard came from local Muslim soldiers standing on the bridge in Kulen Vakuf over the

932 Ibid., 157-158.

933 Interview with Nataša Kadić on 22 and 23 September in Kulen Vakuf.
Una River. They were unloading clip after clip from their automatic rifles into the grey autumn sky in a bittersweet celebration of finally coming home.

The traditions of multi-national co-existence and extreme sectarian violence are essential parts of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the twentieth century. Through the prism of Kulin Vakuf region, this study had shown how the fortunes of both traditions ebbed and flowed, especially in response to the actions of outside forces which, in alliance with local actors, sought to dismember Bosnia and Herzegovina and radically remake the national composition of its population. The Germans in 1941, and the Republic of Serbia in 1992, staged massive interventions which succeeded in destroying the internal order of Bosnia and Herzegovina and set the stage for periods of extraordinary mass violence. This is not to say that tensions and conflicts among Bosnians of various backgrounds were not of serious consequence in explaining these instances of killing. But without large-scale interventions from the outside, it is unlikely that internal disputes would have been resolved by mass killing and expulsion.

After 1945, the Communist regime, which had opposed sectarian violence and championed a multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina, imposed peace but demanded silence about the inter-ethnic mass killing of the Second World War. This was especially striking with regard to the mass murder of Muslim civilians, the wartime dynamics of which called into question the legitimacy of the new regime. Yet the consequence of the Communist reliance on silence as a means of building “Brotherhood and Unity” ultimately contributed to perpetuating the widespread myth of all Muslims as Ustashas. For the nationalists who sought to destroy multi-national Bosnia and Herzegovina in
1992 through sectarian violence, this notion eventually became a weapon in their arsenal during a period of acute crisis. In short, the unintended effects of the Communist silence about World War Two mass killings, originally employed in the service of promoting multi-ethnicity and peace (as well as protecting the legacy of the Partisan Movement), became a propaganda tool of nationalists committed to ethnic cleansing. This was a cruel paradox that the Communists bequeathed to the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After the end of the most recent war, sectarian-based remembrance became standard practice because the peace that was achieved in 1995 Dayton Agreement was actually more a state of suspended of war. While Bosnia and Herzegovina still maintained a formal existence as a state, held together by international peacekeepers, it was de facto divided between the Serb Republic and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (dominated by Muslims, many of whom now refer to themselves as Bosniaks, with several Croat-controlled entities). In this context, and after an exceptionally brutal war, it was not surprising that each group was only interested remembering its own victims. Perhaps the most striking manifestation of this intense focus on the remembrance of one’s own victims, and the silence about others, was the case of commemorations in the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica. Bosnian Serbs had carried out a brutal campaign of mass killing and expulsion of the region’s Muslim population in 1992. Yet, unlike so many other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, local Muslims ended up offering serious resistance. In 1993, they carried out a series of attacks on nearby Serbian villages and massacred several hundred Serb civilians. When the Bosnian Serbs took Srebrenica in July 1995, they executed about 8,000 Muslim men and boys, not only in retaliation for these earlier Muslim attacks, but especially to remove
once and for all the Muslim population from the region. When commemoration of these mass killings began several years after the war, it was striking that, although they unfolded in close proximity to each other (both temporally and geographically), each side did not acknowledge the losses of the other, and instead focused only on its own victims. The Muslims referred to the mass killings in Srebrenica as “genocide,” while some Serbs called the fall of the town in 1995 a “liberation.” This state of affairs was hardly surprising given the exceptionally violent nature of the war. But such diametrically opposed acts of remembrance did not bode well for a multi-national population expected to live together in a single state.

In the Kulen Vakuf region, Muslims had been the primary victims during the 1992-1995 war, and thus there were no commemorations and counter commemorations between Muslims and Serbs during the early postwar years. Here, sectarian forms of remembrance were also dominant. In 1997, the Muslim director of the primary school in Kulen Vakuf ordered that the monument which had been unveiled in 1981 to Serb and Muslim “ Fallen Fighters” be demolished. Like others in the region, he believed that some of the names of the Serbs carved on the plaques around the monument had been those of insurgents who had murdered Muslims in September 1941. In the shadow of another episode of mass killing which Serbs had perpetrated against Muslims from 1992 to 1995, the existence of such a disputed memorial was too much for many to bear. As the site was razed to the ground, not only did the traces of the insurgents who had supposedly murdered innocent Muslims vanish; the evidence was also destroyed of Serb and Muslim Partisans who had fought together for the liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the creation of a country in which multi-national co-existence
would be possible. The memory of such individuals, and the ideals they fought for, was yet another casualty of the 1992-1995 war.

The sectarian nature of remembrance in the Kulen Vakuf region continued in the early 2000s with the discovery of the pits where Serbs had murdered the men and boys who they had selected on the bridge at Štrbački buk on 11 June 1992. The remains of these victims were buried in a special cemetery called “the Cemetery of Holy Martyrs” [Šehidsko mezarje], located just north of the village of Ćukovi. In 2004, the first monument to the victims of the September massacres of 1941 was unveiled in Kulen Vakuf. It was a small plaque hung next the bridge over the Buk, near where the Ustasha Miroslav Matijević had once lived, the man who was responsible for unleashing the initial wave of mass killing in the region during the early summer of 1941. The plaque stated that “insurgent units carried out genocide of the Bosniaks on this bridge in September 1941.” And in December 2008, a large monument was unveiled by the bus station in Kulen Vakuf in memory of seventy eight men from the region who Serbs had killed between 1992-1995. Each man’s face and name was carved on black stone which was cut into the shape of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. What was striking about all these monuments was the degree to which they explicitly emphasized the national and confessional identity of the victims. Another central element was the intimate relationship between the mass killing of Muslims/Bosniaks and the need for a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, all the monuments convey an image of Muslims exclusively as victims. Nowhere is there any mention of Muslim crimes against others. From the current memorial landscape, it is impossible to know that Muslims joined the Ustashas in 1941 and engaged in the mass killings of their Serb neighbors.
45 and 46. Above is the “Cemetery of Holy Martyrs of the Valley of Heroes,” burial site for the Muslims from the Ljutoč valley who were executed by Serbs in 1992. Photograph taken by the author on 19 October 2006 in Dulidba. Below is the monument for these men in Kulen Vakuf. Carvings of their faces are arranged on a plaque in the shape of Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggesting that they died for the unity of the country. Photograph taken by the author on 6 December 2008 in Kulen Vakuf.
Unlike under the Communist regime, all war victims in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina may now be publicly remembered and in whatever ways individuals deem appropriate. But the new spokespeople for the dead generally portray their victims as “the real victims” while remaining silent and oblivious to the sufferings endured by others. This is an approach to remembrance that was practiced most intensely during the 1945-1990 period. As was the case during the years of Communist rule, selective remembrance and silence about violent wartime atrocities remains ubiquitous in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only today, instead of serving the cause of “Brotherhood and Unity,” acts of remembrance and silence are now used to glorify the victims of one’s “nation” while often simultaneously demonizing, ignoring, or forgetting others. In the end, after a twentieth century filled with two horrific wars and the experimentation with nearly every possible political system, a troubling question remains for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina: will the thousands of dead ever become an object primarily for intense grieving and mourning, rather than yet another weapon to be used in the region’s ongoing political conflicts?
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