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Broken Bosnia: The Localized Geopolitics of Displacement and Return in Two Bosnian Places

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The Dayton Peace Accords brought the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to an end but left ethnonationalism undefeated and the country divided. The Accords legitimized the wartime entity *Republika Srpska*, created by ethnic cleansing, yet offered the possibility of reversing ethnic cleansing with Annex VII, which declared the right of those displaced to return to their prewar homes. Implementing Annex VII across ethnonationalist-dominated localities was a struggle of power, capacity, and law over the control of place in postwar Bosnia. This article examines the localized geopolitics of wartime displacement and postwar returns in two contrasting Bosnian counties, Zvornik in eastern Bosnia, and Jajce in central Bosnia. Based on extensive fieldwork in both places, the article documents how the Bosnian war radically transformed the demographic character and cultural landscape of both places. The postwar effort to implement Annex VII developed as a struggle over place between entrenched local ethnonationalists, multiple international agencies, and displaced persons. In the years following the war, ethnonationalist forces were largely successful in blocking “minority returns.” In response, the international community had, by 1999, imposed a legal system upon Bosnia’s entities that facilitated returns and developed the local capacity to allow returns to (re)take place. Power tilted from localized ethnonationalists to localized internationals, and ethnically cleansed Bosnian places began to see more and more minority returns. Bosnian places, however, will never be as they were before the war. Bosnia remains a broken country. **Key Words:** *Bosnia and Herzegovina, localized geopolitics, wartime displacement, postwar returns, refugees and displaced persons, international community, Zvornik, Jajce.*

In November 1995, the United States, the European Union, and political leaders from the former Yugoslavia met on a military base in Dayton, Ohio, to redesign cartographically the war-ravaged country of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ever since the passage of a referendum on independence in March 1992, the former Yugoslavia republic had been convulsed by a war to separate its people and partition its territory into ethnic statelets. Over half of the country’s 4.4 million people had been driven from their homes. An estimated 250,000 were dead, over a million had fled the country as refugees, and slightly fewer than a million were internally displaced in often dire circumstances (Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees 2003).¹ More than three-quarters of Bosnia’s housing stock was damaged or destroyed by the war, often as a deliberate tactic in the campaign of ethnic cleansing to prevent the return of the displaced (Housing Sector Task Force 1999). The opposing forces also severed electrical grids, telephone lines, water systems, and roads along the lines of confrontation. In frontline areas, destruction of homes and infrastructure was near total. Bosnia, in short, was a broken country.

Through the use of digital mapping technology, the parties to the Bosnian war were finally able to settle upon a line that divided war-ravaged Bosnia into two separate

entities (see Figure 1). One entity, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, included the areas controlled by the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Bosnian Croats. The second entity, *Republika Srpska*, roughly coincided with the ethnonationalist homeland claimed by the Bosnian Serb leadership before the war. This line was not supposed to be a border, which would imply the partitioning of Bosnia as those who initiated the war had sought. Instead, it was described as an “inter-entity boundary line” and deciding where it ran was the most contentious issue at Dayton (Holbrooke 1998). The resulting Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) established a negative peace, a cessation of hostilities, but did not address the underlying political conflict over the nature of the Bosnian state that had caused the war. On the one hand, by establishing the entities, the DPA legitimated the ethnonationalist division of what was previously a multiethnic republic. In particular, it institutionalized the exclusivist territorial entity, *Republika Srpska*, that was forged through a campaign of violence and terrorism against civilians that gave the world a new spatial metaphor: ethnic cleansing. On the other hand, Annex VII of the DPA promised all refugees and displaced persons the right to recover their prewar property and return home without obstruction, the first time such a robust

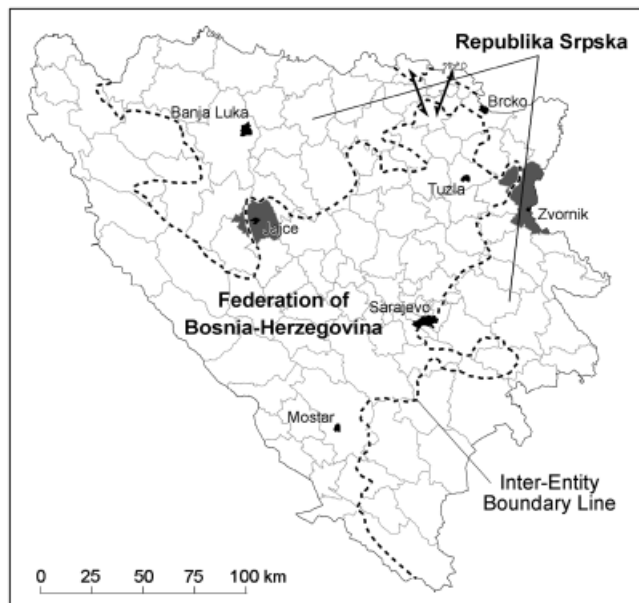


Figure 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing the postwar territorial subdivision of the country into two entities. Local county (*opština*) boundaries are shown with study sites highlighted.

right to return had been established in treaty (Stavropoulou 1998). If fully implemented, this clause held the possibility of undermining the very ethnoterritorial division of the country sanctioned at Dayton. Few, however, believed that Annex VII would ever be fully implemented or that persons would return to homes in areas now controlled by another ethnic group (Ito 2001). Ethnonationalist parties dominated the ethnically cleansed localities of Bosnia, while Bosnian refugees were scattered across the world and the internally displaced lived in miserable collection centers, cramped apartments, and temporary collective settlements.

Geopolitics has long been characterized by intrastate warfare, collapsed states, genocide, and forced population displacements (Hyndman 2000; Wood 2001; Helton 2002; Power 2002). The last decade has seen humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping operations, and state building as international norms of response, debated and decided upon at the highest levels of international affairs (ICISS 2001; Caplan 2002; Terry 2002). But, as cases from Cambodia to Iraq demonstrate, the local context of implementation is central to the success or failure of efforts at postwar reconstruction, state building, and population return (Mercier 1995; Chandler 2000; Cousens and Cater 2001; Bose 2002; Knaus and Martin 2003; Paris 2004). Going beyond the geopolitics forged in international capitals, this article examines the localized geopolitics of wartime displacement and postwar return in two formerly multiethnic

Bosnian localities.² We use the term “localized” rather than “local geopolitics” to avoid reifying scale. Bosnian places, like all places, have always been part of a scalar geopolitics that links them to regional and global dynamics (Castree 2004). Some links are better known, such as the Sarajevo murder that proved the tipping point for World War I. From the shifting territorial governmentalities of empires (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) to late-twentieth-century *gastarbeiter* migrations, Bosnian localities have long been produced by regional and continental relations and not solely by local practices. The so-called Bosnian war was mediated by localities but not fully produced there. The war was part of a larger violent breakup of Yugoslavia, planned by the Milošević regime in Serbia, and executed by the Yugoslav Army with the support of Serbian-based militias (Gow 2003). It was also a drama significantly influenced by regional religious establishments, international diplomatic missions, and diasporic communities (Owen 1995; Perica 2002; Hockenos 2003). Consequently, the battle over Bosnian places that we describe is not a local versus international antagonism but a localized geopolitical struggle featuring multiple actors and scalar relationships. The research is part of our larger interest in critical geopolitics, nationalism’s territoriality, and state building as governmentality (Herb and Kaplan 1999; Ó Tuathail 2003; Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2004a; G. White 2000).

The localities we chose to study are Zvornik, a county in eastern Republika Srpska adjacent to Serbia, and Jajce, a county in central Bosnia that is part of the Federation, though locally divided between Croats and Bosniaks. Jajce and Zvornik were chosen as research sites because they represented typical multiethnic Bosnian places that subsequently were torn apart by war. Yet, no place is fully typical, and, given that we have chosen what are now Bosnian Serb- and Croat-dominated towns, we hasten to add that there are also Bosniak-dominated counties where returns by Serbs and Croats are difficult. Drawing upon extensive fieldwork between 2002 and 2004 within the two localities, we “emplot” the story of displacement and return as a geopolitical struggle over place.³ Our account is a necessarily concise rendering of three sources of information. First, wartime and contemporary accounts were collected during extensive interviews with: local officials and members of the international community at the heart of the returns process, mayors and members of the county councils in Zvornik and Jajce, international community officials in Sarajevo, returnees, and leaders of displaced persons associations. Second, historical accounts of local events were collected from local and international newspaper or

wire reports and testimony before the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia (hereafter ICTY). Aspects of these accounts were corroborated by eye-witnesses we interviewed (see Appendix for our list of interviewees). Third, academic studies and organizational reports were used to provide broader contextualization and analysis. Our emplotment is, of course, contestable, but we would argue that it has two distinct merits. First, it breaks with a prevailing narrative form in Bosnia, namely production of self-as-victimized stories while denying responsibility for victimizing others (Cigar 1995; MacDonald 2002). Second, it is grounded in the analysis of spatial practices that are understood by the protagonists themselves as political power struggles. Our localized geopolitical storyline is not an outside imposition but reflects the understandings that ethnonationalist, international, and also returnee leaders themselves hold of the postwar changes in Bosnia.

Our narrative of localized geopolitics develops around two themes. First, we document how the returns process is contingent upon the particular circumstances of the places we studied: their prewar ethnic populations, the geography of ethnic cleansing and displacement, wartime power structure, and the contemporary political dynamics of obstructionism and accommodationism

in these localities. Second, we argue that the returns process developed as a struggle of capacity and power between the international community and Bosnia's local ethnonationalist authorities. It was also a contest of power and will between returnees and ethnonationalist forces determined to prevent returns. Our argument is that the returns process in postwar Bosnia is a localized geopolitical struggle between those who seized power during the war and sought to institutionalize local regimes of ethnic supremacy, on the one hand, and the international community and returnees, on the other, who have undone many of the initial mechanisms of local ethnic supremacy but have not succeeded in "putting Humpty-Dumpty together again" (Zartman 1998). Bosnia remains a broken country, reconstruction a work in progress, and genuine reconciliation still a long way off.

Zvornik, the Fortress on the Drina

The eastern Bosnian county of Zvornik lies on the border with Serbia along the west bank of the Drina River, which gives its name to the surrounding region, Podrinje. Except for the river valley, most of the county is mountainous, with numerous isolated villages engaged in small-hold agriculture. The last census in Bosnia listed

Table 1. Population Structure of Zvornik and Jajce

	Bosniak		Serb		Croat		Other		Total
Zvornik									
1991 Census	48,102	59%	30,863	38%	122	<1%	2,208	3%	81,295
Postwar subdivisions (split by interentity boundary line)									
Zvornik (Republika Srpska)									
1991 est.*	42,962	59%	27,961	38%	119	<1%	2,173	3%	73,215
1998 est.	600	1%	59,400	99%	0	–	0	–	60,000
Sapna (Federation)									
1991 est.	5,140	64%	2,902	36%	3	<1%	35	<1%	8,080
1998 est.	13,267	100%	1	<1%	3	<1%	56	<1%	13,327
	Bosniak		Serb		Croat		Other		Total
Jajce									
1991 Census	17,380	39%	8,663	19%	15,811	35%	3,153	7%	45,007
Postwar subdivisions (split by interentity boundary line)									
Jajce (Federation)									
1991 est.	16,600	39%	7,263	17%	15,611	37%	3,083	7%	42,557
1999 est.	3,978	23%	795	5%	12,727	73%	0	–	17,500
Jezero (Republika Srpska)									
1991 est.	780	32%	1,400	57%	200	8%	70	3%	2,450
1999 est.	153	10%	1,303	89%	3	<1%	0	–	1,459

*Estimates for 1991 were calculated by the authors using county boundaries from 2000. Postwar estimates were provided by Repatriation Information Centre (1998a, b, 1999a, b).

the county population as 81,295, the majority of whom (59 percent) registered as “Muslim,” or Bosniak, nationality, while Serbs comprised 38 percent of the population before the war (see Table 1).⁴ The town of Zvornik itself lies along the Drina near a crossroad connecting the river valley road with a main east–west link between Bosnia and Serbia. Before the war, the town had a population of 14,584 (8,854 Bosniaks), many working in the nearby mines, hydroelectric plant, or the bauxite, textile, and wood-processing factories of the town’s industrial zone. On a promontory above town, the abandoned Austro-Hungarian fortress, Kulagrad, gives a commanding view of the Drina valley, once the frontier of their empire. In the eyes of Serb nationalists, Zvornik was an historically Serb “fortress on the Drina,” the river not a border between Bosnia and Serbia but the “backbone” of the Serb homeland.

The War in Zvornik

Political conditions in Yugoslavia were deteriorating rapidly in 1991 as Bosnia followed Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia in seeking independence from the Yugoslav federation. For Yugoslav President Milošević and his allied Serb nationalists, the dissolution of the “old Yugoslavia” provided an opportunity to pursue their vision of a “new Yugoslavia” as a “Serboslavia” or “Greater Serbia” (Silber and Little 1997, 128; Sell 2002). Local Serb politicians in Croatia and Bosnia established branches of the nationalist *Srpska Demokratska Stranka* (SDS or Serb Democratic Party) and formed breakaway regions that would join Serbia and Montenegro rather than remain in an independent Croatia or Bosnia. In keeping with their geopolitical goal to form a contiguous territory linking these breakaway regions to Serbia proper, Serb nationalists used an amalgam of majoritarian and mythohistorical claims to the areas, most of which contained significant numbers of Bosniaks and Croats (Cigar 2001; Bieber 2002). This led to war, first in Croatia in 1991 and then in Bosnia during the spring of 1992. Following Bosnia’s divisive referendum on independence, Serb nationalists in Zvornik and other breakaway counties declared a *Republika Srpska* (Serb Republic). Local Serb militias, organized and armed by the SDS, then began a military campaign to take control of the territory they claimed, aided by the *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* (JNA or Yugoslav People’s Army) under the control of the Milošević regime in Belgrade. The local Serb militias and JNA formations were joined by paramilitary organizations from Serbia who spearheaded the fighting.

The combined Serb forces began their campaign against Bosnia on 1 April with attacks on towns along

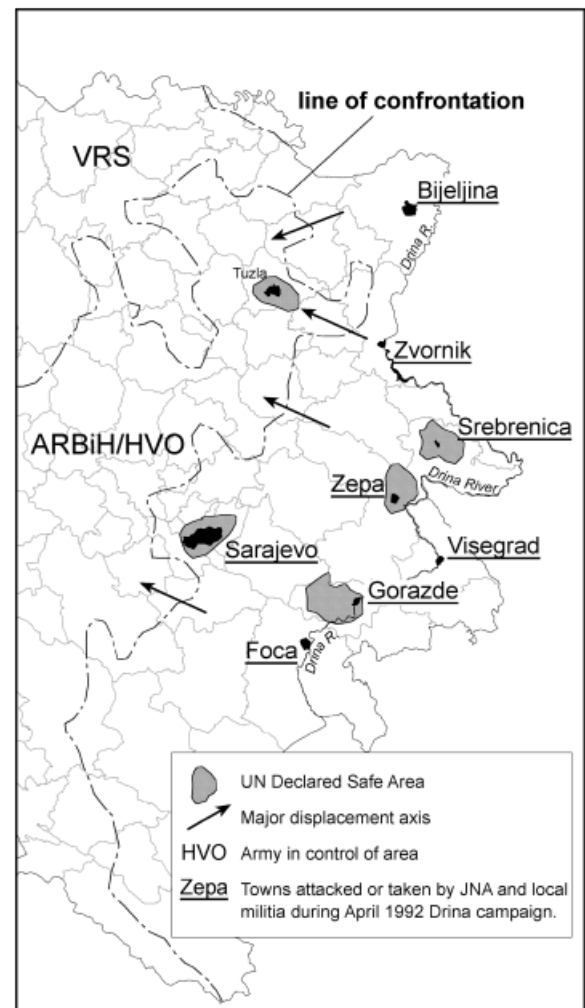


Figure 2. The Serb military operation in the Drina River valley and related displacement axes, April 1992. Those towns in eastern Bosnia that held off the attacks were placed under U.N. mandated “safe areas” in 1993.

the Drina River, beginning with Bijeljina in the north-east (Human Rights Watch 2000) (see Figure 2).⁵ The military seizure of strategic sites and ethnic cleansing of the town’s Bosniak community involved the use of violent and terrorist tactics against both leaders and civilians. Some were murdered and others compelled to leave. The town of Zvornik was attacked several days after Bijeljina by many of the same units. Most of Zvornik’s Serb population had been warned to leave the area in the days before the attack, after which Serb forces surrounded the town. Believing a compromise was possible, local members of the Bosniak political party *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* (SDA or Party of Democratic Action) negotiated with local SDS leaders for a geopolitical division of the city between Serbs and Bosniaks. The commanders of the Serb forces, especially paramilitary leader Željko “Arkan” Ražnatović, vetoed the deal

between the local parties and attacked on the night of 8 April, shelling the town from the industrial zone to the north and from artillery positions across the Drina in Serbia. Some of the town's residents managed to flee to Mali Zvornik, on the Serbian side of the Drina, while others headed west toward Tuzla. By morning, the town had fallen, as the last Bosniak defenders and some residents retreated to the Kulagrad fort. In the town's center, a Serbian flag flew from one of the minarets, its public-address speakers blasting Serb music instead of the muezzin's call to prayer.⁶ The music was punctuated by the gunfire of Serbian paramilitary units, which took turns looting and pillaging the town while carrying out the policy of ethnic cleansing.⁷ Over the course of a few days that April, an estimated 2,500 people were murdered while many more were imprisoned, tortured, or raped before being expelled from Zvornik. Everyday places like sports centers, schools, hotels, factories, and local farms became detention centers and prison camps; mass graves were dug throughout the county to bury the bodies (United Nations Commission of Experts 1994b, c).⁸

Zvornik's local SDS leadership soon established a "crisis committee" to take control of the formerly Bosniak-majority county, which they renamed the Serbian Community of Zvornik. Their work was largely geared toward completing the ethnic cleansing campaign, including the confiscation and reassignment of homes and land. With the help of local Serb-owned businesses, they organized the deportation of the remaining Bosniaks, who were forced to sign over their property to the county (United Nations Commission of Experts 1994a). Many of the displaced were bussed to Bosniak-controlled territory near Tuzla, while others were sent as far away as Hungary. The ethnic cleansing of Zvornik's remote villages was, meanwhile, accomplished by Serbian paramilitary units. Residents of two such villages, Jusići and Dugi Dio, told us how Serb commanders appeared in their village demanding the surrender of weapons and submission to Serb rule. The Serb units then detained the village leaders, fighting-aged men, and some women, murdering some and deporting others. The remaining villagers fled on foot or were deported by bus to Tuzla, already swollen with tens of thousands of displaced persons from the vast ethnic cleansing campaign in eastern Bosnia (Cohen 1994). As the rest of Bosnia became engulfed in war during the summer of 1992, Zvornik's new leadership encouraged Serbs living in Bosniak- and Croat-controlled regions to resettle in Zvornik, now a largely depopulated county.

Zvornik was but one of many territories in Bosnia ethnically cleansed during the war. In each of these places, terror, murder, and forced displacement were part

of a war waged against people, their homes, and lifeworlds (Weine 1999; Naimark 2001). The legacy of what happened in 1992 would also cast a long shadow over the years to come. More than 50,000 persons fled or were expelled from Zvornik during the campaign of ethnic cleansing, most of them Bosniaks, but also Croats, Roma, and Yugoslavs, as well as several hundred Serbs who opposed the Serb nationalists. Depopulated of most of its prewar residents, Zvornik soon became a resettlement site for approximately 31,000 Serbs, themselves displaced from areas seized by Croat and Bosniak forces. Serbs also moved to Zvornik during a large exodus from Tuzla early in the war and again in 1996 when Serbs left Sarajevo neighborhoods that the DPA placed under Federation rule (CIMIC-Group 1998; Cousens and Carter 2001, 63). The massive displacements out of and into Zvornik created not only an exclusively Serb population but one in which prewar domicile Serbs were outnumbered by displaced Serbs from other parts of Bosnia.

The attack on Zvornik did not stop with murder and expulsion but included the systematic destruction of residential and cultural property, what Porteous and Smith term "domicide" or the destruction of home against the will of the home dweller (Porteous and Smith 2001, 3). In the ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia, expulsions were followed by the destruction of houses, religious sites, and community buildings in an effort to render return impossible. Serb forces destroyed many villages in Zvornik that had been exclusively Bosniak, though houses in town or near Serb villages were left standing in anticipation of displaced Serbs. Of Zvornik's 18,338 prewar residences, more than 1,000 were wholly destroyed and another 5,300 heavily damaged (Housing Sector Task Force 1999). The destruction of cultural objects was even more thorough: all twenty-six mosques and some other property belonging to the Islamic community in Zvornik were destroyed (RMAP 2003, 59). Moreover, some destroyed properties were built upon, as in the town of Zvornik, where a local businessman with ties to the SDS leadership built an apartment block and café on the ruins of a mosque.

Another of Zvornik's destroyed mosques is now a small empty lot, hemmed in by an enlarged intersection to one side and a large apartment building on the other. The apartment building stands upon the site of former Bosniak businesses, confiscated and then sold by the self-appointed Serb leadership to a construction company run by a founding member of Zvornik's SDS involved in the attack on the town (ICG 2000). Outside the town, in the village of Divić, the Serb Orthodox leadership built a new church on the ruins of a destroyed mosque; this action remains a source of tension to this day.

Typical of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Bosniak sites were destroyed not in the crossfire of war but as part of a deliberate campaign to remove all signs of the community's existence. Zvornik's wartime Serb mayor, Branko Grujić, attempted to justify these acts using a discourse that compressed time into a mythic symmetry: "The Turks destroyed the Serbian church that was here when they arrived in Zvornik in 1463. Now we are rebuilding the church and reclaiming this as Serbian land forever and ever" (quoted in Cohen 1994, A1). For Zvornik's former residents, however, trauma and fear marked this new landscape, in which everyday places served as reminders of suffering and loss.

Initial Returns to Zvornik, 1996–1999

The war's end in December 1995 did little to change the situation that had prevailed in Zvornik since 1992. For the entrenched Serb nationalists in Zvornik and elsewhere, Dayton's recognition of the Republika Srpska was international legitimization of their wartime aspirations and the violence that created a divided Bosnia. The interentity boundary line and its four-kilometer zone of separation was now a permanent fact on the ground, splitting prewar Zvornik county into two counties, a small one in the Federation named Sapna and the much larger "Serb Zvornik" in the Republika Srpska (see Figure 3). The presence of Dayton-sanctioned international troops (IFOR or Implementation Force), the heavy mine contamination, and Serb checkpoints along this boundary line contributed to the Serbs' sense of having successfully established a border separating themselves from Muslim Bosnia. Despite the guarantees of Dayton's Annex VII that the displaced could return to their homes, local nationalist authorities in places like Zvornik were openly hostile to returns and continued to enforce wartime laws that "legalized" the reassignment of former Bosniak property to displaced Serbs.

Zvornik's former residents faced numerous obstacles to their return. Immediately after the war, the continued presence of armed forces limited mobility and blocked any movement across the interentity boundary line. Nonetheless, displaced Bosniaks living in Tuzla's miserable collection centers had a strong desire to return home. During the spring of 1996, in the first months after Dayton, thousands of displaced persons attempted to return to or visit their homes in eastern Bosnia in order to celebrate a Muslim holiday near family graves. In anticipation, local Serb nationalists mobilized gangs of armed thugs who threatened violence against any "Muslim terrorists" returning to the Republika Srpska. Despite Dayton's guarantee of the right to return,

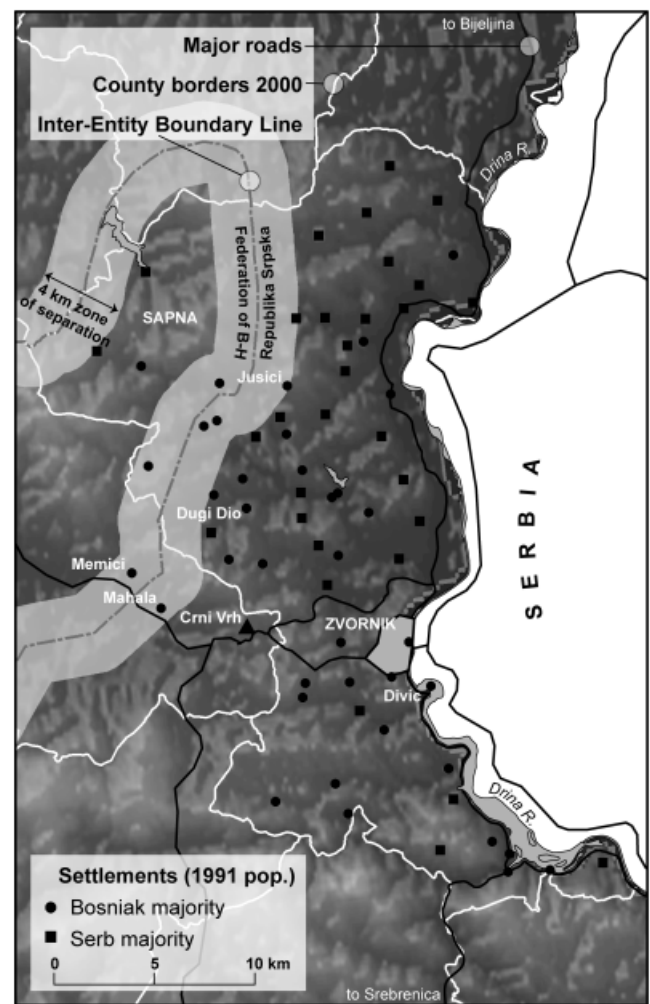


Figure 3. Postwar geography of Zvornik.

American and Polish IFOR troops erected a barricade at Memici on the western edge of the zone of separation, with orders to stop all movement except for those visiting villages on the Federation side of the boundary line. Instead of providing protection for returnees, IFOR commanders decided that implementation of Annex VII and other civilian provisions of Dayton were the responsibility of local county authorities, abdicating responsibility to those who had overseen the terror and expulsion in the first place. The main road between Tuzla's refugee centers and the ethnically cleansed villages of Zvornik remained closed to returns for the next three years. The unwillingness of IFOR to support Annex VII returns into Republika Srpska was seen by many in the Federation as a de facto endorsement of partition.

Despite these obstacles, several displaced villages organized surreptitious return expeditions to homes in the zone of separation during the spring of 1996, occasionally

meeting violent opposition by organized mobs. The earliest of these “spontaneous returns” were to the villages of Mahala in the neighboring county Osmaci and to Dugi Dio and Jusići, in the mountainous backcountry of Zvornik. Some of these returns were supported by the local SDA party, which sought to traverse the Dayton boundary line, and by Tuzla Canton officials, who sought to relieve pressure on the city of Tuzla. Like many villagers, the former residents of Mahala, Dugi Dio, and Jusići kept in close contact during their displacement in Tuzla, transforming their former Yugoslav community association (*mjesna zajednica*) into a displaced persons association. Many of the men from the three villages had quietly returned to their villages by April 1996, when local Serbs detected them. Despite the presence of IFOR troops, Bosnian Serb gangs attacked the returnee villages, burning down several houses while an angry mob surrounded the local headquarters of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in town to protest against the returns. According to the mayor and police chief in Zvornik, the returnees were “Muslim terrorists” sent by the Federation to break apart the new Serb entity. Responding to Serb anger over the returnees, Russian IFOR troops forced the villagers in Jusići to return to the Federation side of the boundary line until Serb police could search the village for weapons and county officials could register the returnees. These crises prompted the international community to establish a commission to oversee returns to the zone of separation in what amounted to a negotiation with Serb authorities to implement Annex VII in the one area exclusively controlled by IFOR.

The events of 1996 highlight the geopolitical struggle that prevailed in Bosnia after the war. For the SDS and displaced Serbs, *Republika Srpska* was the supreme territorial identity, the very name demarcating a new exclusivist sovereign homeland of security through separation. For returnees, however, the territory was first and foremost “Bosnian” and the site of their old, familiar houses, a place where they hoped to end the insecurity of their displacement (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005). *Republika Srpska* predominated over Bosnia at this stage, with the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing having their power “legitimated” in hasty national elections in September 1996. The Serbs treated the interentity boundary line as an international border, whereas they regarded the internationally recognized border with Serbia as something of an internal administrative boundary. Local Serb authorities refused to display the symbols of a unified Bosnian state or to respect the laws that applied to both entities. Identification cards, letterhead, and road signs in Cyrillic produced *Republika Srpska* as a

mundane, inhabited reality while telephone exchanges, license plates, and currency marked the entities as different geopolitical spaces (Billig 1995).⁹ The real obstacle to returns, however, was official obstructionism by the local authorities. In Jusići, Dugi Dio, and other villages in Zvornik, returnees were only able to reclaim uninhabited property in or near the zone of separation. Without cooperation from the local authorities to reverse the wartime property laws, returnees to other areas could not reestablish possession over their homes and evict the present occupants.

At this stage, the international community lacked the capacity and power required to take on the local geopolitical strength of the SDS and related Serb nationalist groups. The DPA had given primary responsibility for supporting returns to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mainly because it had years of experience dealing with refugees and displaced persons in Bosnia and had personnel on the ground. During the war, however, the UNHCR had always operated within a context determined by localized coercion, transporting, for example, the displaced from ethnically cleansed regions.¹⁰ With the war over but the conflict unresolved, it lacked the capacity to challenge the power structures created by war. IFOR had coercive capacity but was reluctant to use it for more than very limited military ends. Though several wartime leaders were under indictment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, IFOR troops refused to arrest them even when the opportunity presented itself. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), a civilian administrator created under Dayton to implement the nonmilitary annexes of the agreement, was the most significant site of potential countervailing power to local authorities. Initially, however, this office was underfunded, disorganized, and granted limited powers.

The power relationship between the international community and local authorities slowly began to change over the subsequent years as IFOR (renamed SFOR or Stabilization Force in December 1996), the OHR, the UNHCR, and the OSCE built the capacity to operate locally and coordinated their activities around priorities like minority returns—in most cases the return of Bosniaks to *Republika Srpska*.¹¹ Three policy innovations provided the necessary capacity to improve the prospects for return. First, the OHR acquired the power to remove local officials from office if they were deemed to be obstructionist toward the implementation of Dayton. Reluctantly used at first, the OHR gradually came to wield this power effectively in forcing local officials to cooperate with Dayton’s implementation or else face perma-

nent removal from holding any public office. Second, in early 1997, under the leadership of the OHR and the UNHCR, international organizations involved or concerned with returns in local areas throughout Bosnia began meeting to plan, coordinate, and implement the returns process. These Reconstruction and Return Task Force meetings focused on coordinating ground-level support for minority returns, information sharing on obstacles to returns, and directing donor aid to sites ready for returns. Local officials were not involved in the meetings but informed about decisions and planned returns with the expectation that they needed to demonstrate cooperation. Finally, the OHR developed a package of laws governing the procedures whereby people displaced from their homes in 1992 could reclaim title to their property and physical ownership over it. Known as the Property Law Implementation Plan, the package sought to sweep aside the arbitrary wartime laws on residential property and replace it with a standardized code in keeping with the DPA. It generated so much controversy and resistance from entity politicians that the OHR had to use his new powers to impose the changes by administrative fiat. Along with more mundane changes like standardized vehicle license plates and easing border control along the interentity boundary line, the international community by 1999 had built the necessary capacity for returns to take place.

Having people actually return, house by house, village by village, community by community, was an enormous challenge for the international community, an ambitious spatial (re)engineering and place (re)building, with the purpose of allowing Bosnians the possibility of restoring places to their prewar multiethnic character. This struggle over place pitted the determination of returnees and the organizational capacity of the international community against the obstructionist stratagems of local authorities and politicians. For many displaced persons, having reestablished themselves in new places, the long period that passed since their expulsion in 1992 only added to their uncertainty over returning. Harassment of returnees remained a common obstacle as local security within Zvornik and other parts of the Republika Srpska was provided by Bosnian Serb police, some of whom had participated in the attack on Zvornik and the later genocide around Srebrenica. Displaced persons ready, willing, and able to return faced local housing officers, under the direction of nationalist mayors, who refused and later only slowly recognized Bosniak property claims. Delays were worse when Serbs illegally occupied the claimed property as the local police were unlikely to enforce their eviction. By early 1999, fewer than 600 of Zvornik's 48,000 Bosniaks had returned (see Figure 4).

Most of these returns were to uncontested spaces in the remote margins of the county near the zone of separation patrolled by SFOR.

Organized Returns in Zvornik from 1999 to 2004

By late 1999 the international community had the capacity and power in Bosnian localities to push the returns question and take on obstructionists at the local level. Greater willingness of SFOR to support returns through shows of force in return areas, better international police monitoring of local police actions, and investment in local offices by the international community all improved conditions for return. Local field officers with the OHR and the OSCE continued to monitor property law enforcement in county housing offices, many of which were computerized in an effort to streamline case management. The international community's emphasis on local monitoring and efficiency was part of the property law implementation plan, which also required county housing offices to report a monthly count of returnee property claims and enforcement rates. These techniques rendered the activities of local county housing offices more visible, allowing OHR and OSCE to target more easily laggard or defiant officers. Where these techniques failed to improve conditions for return and repossession, the OHR employed a variety of local diplomatic strategies, such as international aid conditionality, publicly shaming local officials and brandishing the power of removal. In October 1999, the OHR removed twenty-two local officials for obstructing Annex VII provisions. The demonstrated use of this power forced Bosnian Serb politicians to cooperate with Dayton, or at least to appear to do so in public. With continued international community monitoring of local practice, these changes helped increase public acceptance of the returns process.

Even with the shepherding by the international community, property law implementation remained slow in many areas of the Republika Srpska, including Zvornik. Former Bosniak villages occupied by displaced Serbs and the town of Zvornik remained closed to returns. In response, the local Return and Reconstruction Task Force adopted a spatial strategy that first promoted additional returns to the remote and unoccupied villages near the interentity boundary line in the northwest. Returns to these unoccupied spaces created a momentum that allowed breakthrough returns to nearby villages. Soon the process began to require the departure of illegal occupants in villages that were not destroyed. Moving southward from the boundary line, interna-

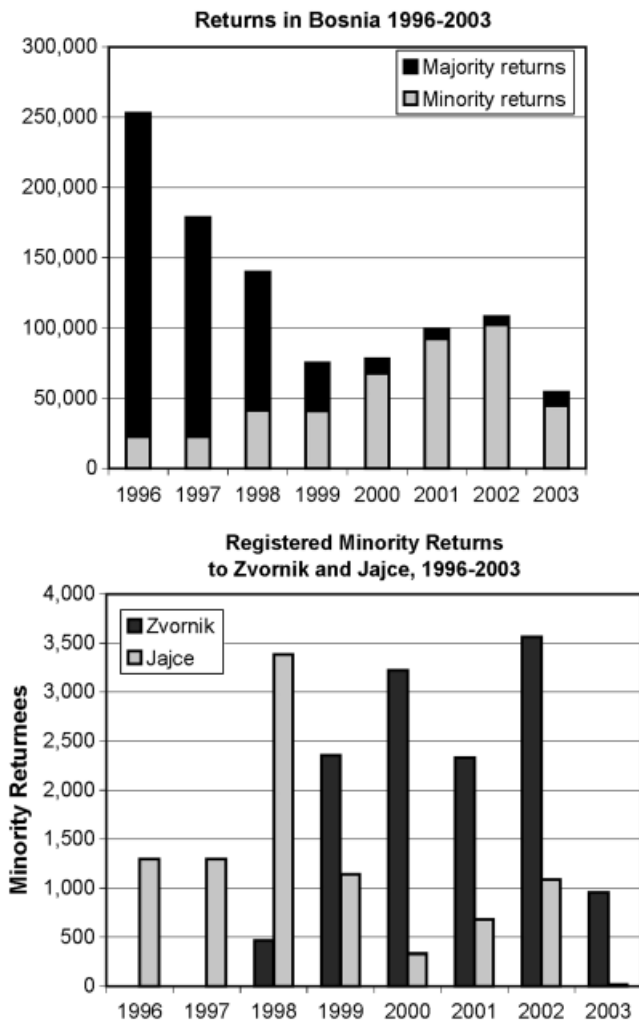


Figure 4. The top graph represents annual totals for minority and majority returnees throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The bottom graph represents annual figures for minority returns to Zvornik and Jajce counties (Source: Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees 2003).

tionally supported minority returns to Zvornik increased dramatically from 1999 to 2002 (see Figure 4). In total, 14,829 of Zvornik's 42,962 prewar Muslim residents returned by March 2005 (UNHCR 2005).¹²

Tensions remained, however, over returns to contested spaces, urban and semiurban areas, where displaced Serbs continued to occupy former Bosniak property despite the revocation of wartime laws by the OHR. In Zvornik, property law enforcement—eviction—did not markedly improve until 2002. Until then, obstructionist housing officers throughout the Republika Srpska made it difficult for returnees. Long lines and slow progress discouraged would-be returnees who had to travel long distances from temporary residences in the Federation to file property claims. Others simply hoped to reestablish their ownership and sell the property to the new occupants, never to

return. Despite international monitoring, the local housing officer in Zvornik understood that minimal compliance would limit Bosniak returns to Zvornik, in keeping with the tacit goals of the local nationalist elite.

All villages in Zvornik had seen some level of returns by 2001, though the process of returns often provoked localized violence and riots by illegal occupants. Such incidents have plagued the village of Divić (pop. 1,388, 1991), which lies on a small peninsula in the Drina River, next to the dam above the town itself. Prior to the war, Divić was 98 percent Bosniak, but it was ethnically cleansed during the attack on Zvornik in 1992. Its former residents were replaced by displaced Serbs from central Bosnia, and Zvornik's wartime leaders renamed the settlement *Sveti Stephan* (Saint Stephan). As noted, the mosque and related buildings were burned down, and the local Orthodox clergy built a church on the mosque's ruins in 1996, claiming the settlement was historically Serb. Bosniak attempts to return to the village triggered several riots, but eventually, the new property laws were enforced, illegal occupants evicted, and returnees allowed to reoccupy what was left of their houses (this process of transfer was often accompanied by looting on the part of the departing Bosnian Serbs; RMAP 2003, 35). Despite the village's reversion to a Bosniak-majority settlement, the Orthodox Church remains, as does the name Saint Stephan. Similarly, displaced Bosnian Serbs illegally occupying Bosniak houses in Kozluk (pop. 3,017, 1991) set barricades across the main road between Zvornik and Bijeljina to block returning Bosniaks in 2000. In the village of Djulići (pop. 1,043 in 1991), which had been 98 percent Bosniak before the war, Bosniaks returning in 2001 were also confronted by angry Bosnian Serbs. By this time, the returnee process was seen as a legal inevitability and, in the wake of a media campaign about the property law implementation process, most occupants recognized that they could not expect to remain in someone else's property. What were previously thought to be permanent wartime acquisitions were now seen as illegally occupied properties.

In response to the inevitability of returns, some local authorities in Republika Srpska began a policy of allocating land plots to those Bosnian Serbs being forced to leave repossessed property. Rather than have them return to their own homes in the Federation, local authorities sought to capture permanently these displaced Serbs and thus consolidate demographic majorities in the Republika Srpska. In this way, even if Bosniak returnees came back in large numbers, Serbs would still be in the majority, which meant, in the political calculus of nationalist politicians, they would still be in power. Land

allocation involved the subdivision of socially owned land (land owned by the county) and the granting of it to those with demonstrated “social needs.” In practice, land plots were granted to Bosnian Serb war veterans, widows, and those evicted from illegally occupied property. Many of the land allocation sites were rural farm cooperatives, lacking basic utilities and community roads. Though the OHR placed a moratorium on land allocations, which began among Croats in western Herzegovina, the practice continued as Bosnian Serbs strived to create facts on the ground that the international community would eventually have to accept. The most reliable sources estimate about 2,600 housing plots in Zvornik, predominantly clustered on three major sites, Branjevo, Ekonomija-Karakaj, and Ulice (RMAP 2003, 107–8). Many of the recipients invested heavily in building houses on the land plots, depleting their savings or cash raised by selling their former homes. Frustrated by the lack of services and broken promises, these displaced Serbs remain embittered by their sense of personal loss during the war and the conditions of their resettlement.

The demographic character and cultural landscape of Zvornik town was radically changed by war and remains the most difficult space for returnees. The razing of mosques and Bosniak neighborhoods in the town was followed by their redevelopment into apartment buildings, shopping malls, and town squares by wartime entrepreneurs deeply involved in criminal enterprise. Compensation deals for the destroyed mosques, the legality of land transfers, and charges of corruption and abuse of office against the town’s business elite are currently before the courts in Zvornik. One mosque in the town has been rebuilt, but it is defaced on occasion by menacing graffiti and Serb nationalist posters. Approximately 400 Bosniak families have returned to the town to reclaim their old properties (most sell them), but they live with limited economic prospects amid a community of displaced Bosnian Serbs. Most manufacturing facilities in Zvornik have not reopened; a few have been privatized only to have their assets stripped, while fewer still provide regular employment—and most of that only for Serbs. With high unemployment, a crumbling infrastructure, and overcrowding caused by displacement and return, the town of Zvornik is a blighted postsocialist place. The average monthly salary for those lucky enough to find work is only 350 KM (just over US\$200), the average pension 120KM (RMAP 2003, 82). Serb nationalists may have imagined Zvornik as a fortress on the Drina, but graffiti we observed in March 2004 proclaims a different reality for its residents: *Zvornik smrdi* (Zvornik stinks).

In Jajce, “We Are All Returnees”

In Bosnia’s history, both medieval and modern, the central Bosnian town of Jajce is a significant place. Strategically situated on a hilltop overlooking the Vrbas River, the town became a stronghold for the last Bosnian *bans*, or regents, and was among the last towns to fall during the sixteenth-century Ottoman conquest of the region (Lovrenović 2001, 81). An important regional center during subsequent centuries, Jajce was also the place where Josip Broz Tito brought together the Partisan opposition against the Nazis and laid the foundation for the postwar socialist Yugoslavia (Denitch 1976, 125). After the Second World War, Jajce emerged as a center of heavy industry, which was fueled by hydroelectric dams near the town. Each of the major industrial plants had apartment complexes that were leased to their employees. Before the recent war, these industries provided nearly 70 percent of the 13,421 jobs that supported the county’s 45,000 residents. Jajce in 1991 was a typical multiethnic Bosnian place, with Bosniaks slightly outnumbering Croats and Serbs. The town itself was home to 13,600 people in 1991, of which about 5,200 identified themselves as Muslims, 3,800 as Serbs, and 1,900 as Croats (see Table 1). Predominantly Croat villages could be found immediately beyond the town and in the north, while the east of the county had a mix of Croat and Bosniak residents. Serb and Bosniak villages dominated the western and southern parts of the county.

The War in Jajce

Unlike Zvornik, Jajce changed hands twice during the war. It was first captured by the *Vojska Republike Srpske* (VRS or Army of Republika Srpska) in October 1992 after the early alliance of Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks in central Bosnia fell apart. In September 1995, just before the end of the war, as Bosnian Serb forces were in general retreat, the town was retaken by the Bosnian Croat Army, *Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane* (HVO or Croat Defense Council). Under each occupation, a different “unmixing” of the population occurred. Jajce’s capture by the VRS was accompanied by a campaign of ethnic cleansing that decimated the multiethnic town and surrounding countryside. Within days of the collapse, the county was depopulated save for the population of 8,600 local Serbs, most of whom remained. They were soon joined by displaced Serbs from other areas in central Bosnia. When the town and county were recaptured at the end of the war, Jajce was unevenly divided between the Croat forces who captured the town and the surrounding area and Bosniak forces who ended up in control of only a small

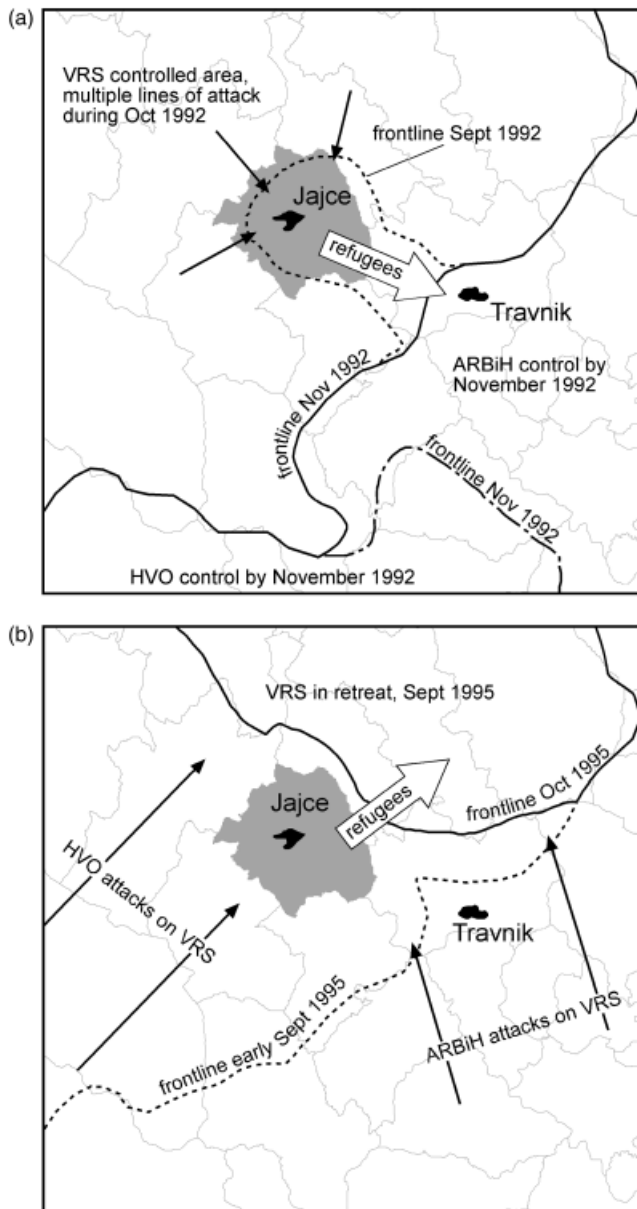


Figure 5. The top map (a) presents the collapse of the joint Bosniak-Croat defense and the fall of Jajce to Serb forces with related displacement axis, October 1992. The bottom map (b) presents the recapture of Jajce by the HVO in September 1995 as part of a larger campaign by the renewed Bosniak-Croat alliance and Croatian forces to push the Bosnian Serb army out of western Bosnia.

area in the south of the county. This recapture also entailed the violent expulsion of domicile and displaced Serb residents. In contrast to Zvornik, virtually all residents of Jajce experienced displacement during the war.

Relations between Croats and Bosniaks are at the heart of the localized geopolitics in Jajce. Unlike the Croat population of western Herzegovina, Bosnian Croats in central Bosnia were not necessarily secessionist

minded, although, when war broke out, they joined the HVO rather than the *Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* (ARBiH or Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina). At first, both armies cooperated in a joint defense of central Bosnia against the VRS, which soon surrounded the town but could not advance easily along its narrow approaches (see Figure 5A). Jajce's defenders expected to hold off the VRS in spite of dire conditions, but their defense of the town collapsed as Croat-Bosniak relations became strained by the swelling number of displaced Bosniaks arriving from ethnically cleansed areas elsewhere in Bosnia. Croat fears that the displaced would alter the demographic character of central Bosnia further aggravated the political rivalry between the Croat nationalist party *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* (HDZ or Croat Democratic Community) and the Bosniak nationalist SDA. Demoralized by the loss of northern Bosnian territory to the VRS and inflamed by the expulsion of Bosniaks by the HVO from the town of Prozor, the alliance began to fall apart in October 1992 (Silber and Little 1997, 291–97; Hoare 2001, 188–89). Jajce's joint defenses collapsed, and Croat and Bosniak residents fled the town in advance of the VRS who took control on 29 October 1992.

A ten-mile column of 30,000 to 40,000 persons fleeing Jajce arrived in Travnik several days later, having survived sniping and shelling by the VRS. Half were displaced from Jajce's rural villages or other counties in western Bosnia. Bosnian Croats in the column tried to work their way toward Croatia, while Bosniaks sought out central Bosnian towns held by friendly forces. Fighting between Croat and Bosniak forces made conditions even worse in the collection centers and temporary shelters of Travnik. Serb advances halted by mid-December, by which time Jajce's population of 45,000 had been reduced to its Serb population—more than 36,000 of its residents had been displaced.

In January 1993, diplomats Cyrus Vance and David Owen released a map of a tentative peace plan that effectively divided up central Bosnia between the warring parties (Owen 1995, 94–159). Release of the map not only served to legitimate Bosniak-Croat fighting but sparked new skirmishes as each side scrambled to consolidate or block territorial allocations (Campbell 1998; Simms 2001). Caught between the VRS and HVO, the ARBiH pursued an offensive strategy to defeat the Croat forces in central Bosnia. Their military goal was to reconnect themselves to southern supply lines and capture strategic military-industrial sites. There was also an expectation in the ARBiH that captured Croat areas would provide resettlement areas for Bosniak refugees from elsewhere in Bosnia (Shrader 2003, 70–71). This strat-

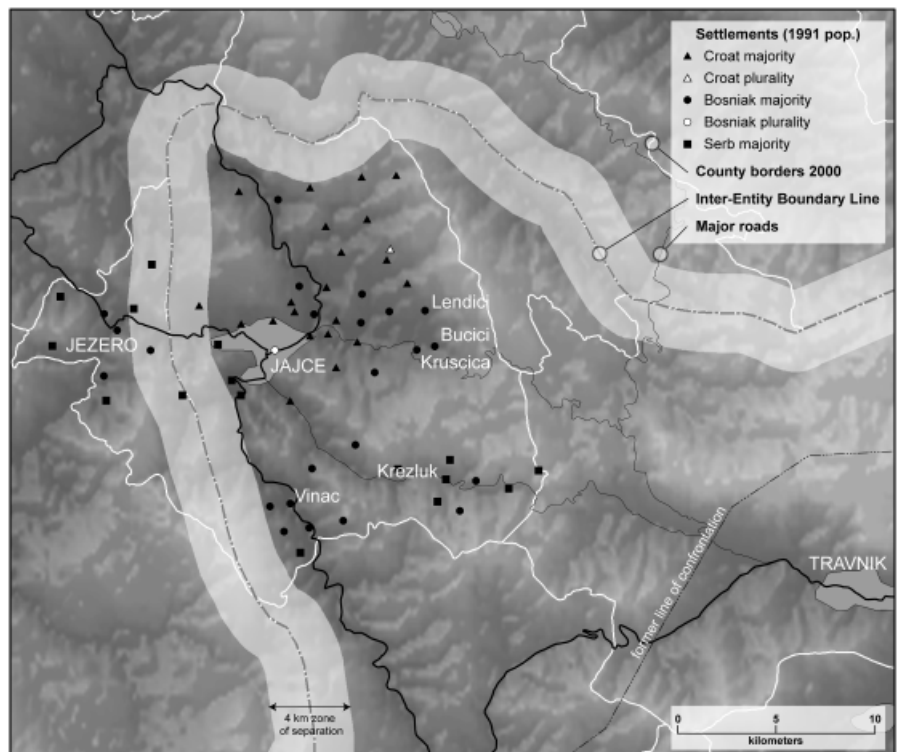
egy produced violent spasms of ethnic cleansing in the Lašva River valley, giving rise to a string of besieged Croat enclaves in the region.

The fighting between ARBiH and HVO forces continued until February 1994, when a ceasefire paved the way for the Washington Agreement that March. It became the basis for Bosnia's second entity, the Croat-Bosniak Federation. Agreement in Washington produced a suspicious and wary alliance between the HVO and ARBiH in central Bosnia; wartime segregation and division on the ground remained. This uneasy alliance did, however, make possible a joint operation in September 1995 by the Croatian regular army, the HVO, and ARBiH to take western Bosnia from Serb forces. Panicked by the fast-moving offensive, VRS troops retreated from Jajce, followed by the town's Serb residents, who fled to the Serb-controlled areas of Banja Luka and Brčko. Jajce was taken on 13 September by Bosnian Croat forces who planted the Croatian state flag in the town center, while ARBiH forces held their position around Travnik to the east (see Figure 5B). During the Dayton talks in November, the county was divided by the interentity boundary line. The western region, where most villages had Serb majorities before the war, was awarded to Republika Srpska and renamed Jezero.¹³ The bulk of the county, which included the town and its major industries, was awarded to the Federation and retained the name Jajce.

Initial Returns to Jajce, 1996–1999

The war and its outcome transformed Jajce as a place. Surrounded on three sides by the boundary line that separated it from the Republika Srpska, many of Jajce's former economic linkages with western Bosnia were severed (see Figure 6). Within Jajce itself, the uneasy peace between the Croat and Bosniak political parties resulted in a county divided between the two, similar to the situation in many central Bosnian counties after the war.¹⁴ The HVO capture of Jajce town and its surrounding villages installed the Bosnian Croat HDZ as the political masters in the north of the county, while ARBiH control around the town of Vinac established Bosniak SDA authority in the southern corner of the county. For Jajce's displaced Croats, HVO control of town and the northern part of the county made immediate return possible (if they had not permanently resettled in Croatia).¹⁵ The returning residents were joined by displaced Bosnian Croats driven from their homes in Republika Srpska or areas of central Bosnia now controlled by the Bosniak SDA party. These displaced Croats quickly moved into homes and apartments belonging to Jajce's Serbs and Bosniaks. Upon seizing the town, HDZ leaders promised Croat residents, both old and new, that Jajce would remain "pure"; former Bosniak and Serb residents would not be allowed to return to the town and nearby villages. Though in clear violation of

Figure 6. Postwar geography of Jajce.



the agreement made at Dayton, these promises gave local Croats a sense of security and displaced Croats a sense of entitlement to property that was not theirs. It was also a move by local HDZ leaders to construct a permanent base of political support and economic power for themselves.

For Jajce's former Bosniak residents, the recapture by Croat forces and subsequent HDZ domination meant that much of the county was closed to returns. A few displaced Bosniaks from Jajce did attempt to return to the town and nearby villages. As in Zvornik, their "spontaneous returns" were met with violent responses and no proactive intervention by international peacekeepers. In August 1997, during the run-up to local elections, Bosniaks returning to the villages of Lendići, Bučići, and Kruščica were attacked by mobs organized by the HDZ. Hundreds of returnees fled the violence during which some reconstructed houses were burned and at least one person murdered. This was one in a series of violent incidents that succeeded in stopping Bosniak returns to the area for several years. Instead, displaced Bosniaks relocated to the southern Vinac area of Jajce county, taking up residence in abandoned Serb properties. With the county effectively segregated, the parties established parallel administrations in their exclusive areas of control. Local elections in 1997 calcified these divisions, as Jajce's large number of displaced Croats helped put HDZ hardliners in the mayor's office. In an effort to offset the emerging local ethnocracy, Bosnia's internationally sponsored election commission installed an SDA representative as Jajce's speaker of the assembly. While this appointment provided a semblance of party balance, it produced not political reconciliation but mutually agreed political apartheid. Both parties cooperated in furthering self-segregation and divided local territorial control. This localized geopolitical bargain suited elites in both parties but did little to address the desire of displaced Bosnians to return home to what were previously multiethnic places.

Local OHR field officers interviewed for this research described the endemic practices of obstructing returns in HDZ- and SDA-dominated regions. The frontline of obstruction was the county housing office, where officers, working at the behest of the parties, processed claims slowly and nonsequentially, refused to evict illegal occupants, and took bribes to expedite or simply falsify claims. In some cases, county officers created legalistic barriers to implementing property decisions, often changing the code itself. As in most Bosnian places, this reluctance was greatest when the occupant was a war veteran, war widow, or other notable whose removal would upset the party or local community. More commonly, the re-

luctance simply reflected Bosnia's postwar reality that parties maintained local political power through ethnic patronage. While the HDZ and the SDA's marriage of convenience helped both parties maintain control over their respective parts of a segregated Jajce, displaced Croats gave the HDZ control over the town and its economic resources (its apartments, businesses, and heavy industry). They set about giving the town an exclusively Croatian character. A large cross and Croatian (not Bosnian) flag were erected on the castle overlooking the town while an extensive memorial to the HVO dead was constructed in Jajce's central square. Justifying their obstruction of Bosniak and Serb returns to the town, HDZ leaders evoked their own wartime suffering and then claimed moral equivalency: "We are all returnees." In HDZ-controlled Jajce, however, Croat returnees were clearly more equal than others.

Political obstacles to returns were soon put to the test as deteriorating living conditions in central Bosnia compelled displaced Bosniaks to return to their homes. In Jajce, their return was focused on those parts of the county unobstructed by the HDZ, mainly in the Vinac area and a few scattered villages around the town. Between 1996 and 1998, roughly 6,000 Bosniaks returned to Jajce, far outpacing returns to other Bosnian counties during this period (UNHCR 2004). These returns were relatively light, however, considering that 25,000 of the county's former residents remained displaced at the end of 1998. Thus, the obstruction to returns had been effective, leaving the once multiethnic Jajce with a population of only 17,500, mostly Bosnian Croats (CIMIC-Group 1999; Repatriation Information Centre 1999a).

Organized Returns, Jajce 1999–2004

The volume of minority returns and the number of places open to return in Bosnia increased significantly during 2000. This was largely the result of improving conditions wrought by the OHR's power to remove obstructionist officials and the international community's success in building capacity for successful returns. The number of minority returns to Jajce, however, tapered off dramatically during and after 2000. Two factors account for this. First, Jajce's geography of displacement and the axes of return were enmeshed in a larger Bosnian geopolitics. Other counties in central Bosnia had short, bilateral axes of displacement, which made the return dynamics mutually reinforcing. In these places, displacement was essentially a population exchange, with returns freeing up housing, which enabled more returns. As noted, Jajce's population was displaced twice during the war: in 1992 when Bosniak and Croat residents fled

to central Bosnia and in 1995 when Serbs fled toward Serb-controlled territory. In this latter displacement the SDS encouraged many of the Serbs who fled Jajce to resettle in Brčko as part of an effort to dominate this geostrategic county, a lynchpin between western and eastern Republika Srpska.¹⁶ Likewise, the large population of displaced Bosnian Croats that resettled in Jajce on the heels of the Croat forces in 1995 was not disposed to return to their homes in Serb- or Bosniak-controlled counties. Jajce had thus lost a large population of now-displaced residents and gained a population of persons displaced from elsewhere, many of whom expressed no desire to return to their original homes.

Second, entrenched nationalist power holders encouraged persistent obstruction to the implementation of uniform property laws imposed by the OHR. The international community did move to force the integration of HDZ and SDA parallel administrations in 1999. Yet hard-line politicians continued to block the evictions needed to open the town and surrounding villages to returns. Local pressure by the OHR and OSCE to support the returns process was less effective in Jajce than elsewhere in Bosnia. This was partially due to the high turnover in Jajce's HDZ mayors, each of whom was given a grace period to produce results. When the first obstructionist mayor elected in 1997 was appointed to another post in Sarajevo, he was replaced by an equally obstructionist mayor in 1999. As the local OHR and OSCE officers prepared to remove the second mayor in 2000, the HDZ power structure in the town chose a lesser-known figure as their candidate in the 2000 local elections. He was duly elected mayor and promised to begin property law implementation, though he himself lived in someone else's property. While the mayor publicly supported the returns process, the more powerful HDZ county president encouraged local Croats to ignore eviction notices. It soon became evident that the new mayor was a puppet of the HDZ power structure with little ability to change the political culture of obstructionism in the housing offices. The local OHR and OSCE officers publicly shamed Jajce as a "black sheep" among Bosnian counties because of its low property law implementation rate. International community officers put pressure on the HDZ at a national level to end local obstruction and also used local media outlets to counteract HDZ propaganda and explain property laws. The mayor finally appointed two new housing officials, who began to make progress on property law implementation in 2001.

Despite the international community's efforts to overcome obstruction to Annex VII guarantees in Jajce, progress toward the larger goal of reintegrating the region has been limited. Property law implementation has

improved to some degree in Jajce following 2001, but county housing officers were still processing claims filed in May 1998 at the end of 2003. Moreover, the property law implementation that has been realized in Jajce is a small portion of the potential; of Jajce's 10,000 prewar residences, fewer than 2,000 property law cases had been resolved by the housing office as of June 2004. This is due in part to self-repossession in which county officials were not involved. More telling, however, is the anemic rate of minority returns: fewer than half of Jajce's Bosniaks and less than 10 percent of its Serbs had returned as of March 2005. Many of the displaced, frustrated by persistent obstructionism and poor economic prospects if they were to return, have rebuilt their lives in the cities and villages where they found shelter during and immediately after the war. As a result, many reclaim their prewar property only to sell it to the new occupants, using the proceeds to purchase a legal residence in their new location.

Eager to present a positive image of his town to visiting researchers, Jajce's HDZ mayor declared, "Jajce is Bosnia in miniature." He explained that the Bosnian flag now flies over the town square, Muslims serve in the county assembly, and a few are now employed by the local authority. This façade of multiculturalism, however, conceals the persistent ethnonationalism and machinations of HDZ power brokers who control the town's valuable industrial sector and have successfully "purified" its once multiethnic character. A Catholic cross still dominates the town's ancient ruins. Next to the Bosnian state flag flies the Croatian state flag, a sign to all that Jajce, in the mayor's words, has a "special relationship" with Croatia.

Conclusion

In September 2004, the UNHCR announced that returns in Bosnia-Herzegovina had passed the one million mark. Twelve years after the forceful displacement of over two million Bosnians, almost half have been able to go back to the places of their former residence. This milestone is a welcome success for the international community. The current High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, justifiably claims that the efforts of the international community "have made a reality, in Bosnia, of a fundamental human right that elsewhere, tragically, only existed on paper—the right of refugees to return home" after warfare (Ashdown 2003). Of these one million returnees, over 440,000 were refugees who returned from exile, some compelled by loss of temporary asylum (Black 2001, 2002). Over 560,000 persons are internally displaced persons returning to their places of

residence in 1991. Over 44 percent of the returnees are minority returnees to residences in areas controlled by another ethnic group. As already noted, Bosniaks returning to Zvornik and Jajce are classified as minority returnees even though they were the largest group in these counties prior to the war. Only in three lightly populated Serb-dominated counties in western Bosnia has minority return actually tilted the overall population balance back to its prewar condition, with minorities becoming majorities once more.

The success of reaching one million returns is tempered by the reality that Bosnia is still a broken country, where obstructionism, political corruption, and economic hardship compound the legacy of wartime displacements (Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2004b). Moreover, it masks the enormous number of persons who remain dislocated by the war. Within Bosnia, over 386,000 were still classified as displaced persons in March 2003, while, outside Bosnia, approximately 100,000 of the 500,000 Bosnian asylum-seekers have still not secured durable solutions, many of them in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria (Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees 2003).¹⁷

Furthermore, the aggregate figure of one million reveals little of the uneven social and spatial patterns of returns. Of the one million returnees, about 61 percent are Bosniaks, 24 percent are Serbs, 13 percent are Croats, and less than 1 percent are other minorities. Nearly three out of every four returns have been to the Federation, reflecting in part its larger prewar population and urban centers, yet also indicating shifting demographics and staggering reconstruction demands (Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees 2003). Returnees and those still displaced tend to be the most marginalized in Bosnia, with high unemployment rates and greater needs for social services (UNDP 2002). Finally, the one million returnees need to be situated next to the approximately 700,000 internally displaced Bosnians who have resettled elsewhere within the country, too afraid and too frustrated by the conditions of return to attempt it or simply too committed to the project of separate ethnoterritorial homelands to want to live again among their former neighbors.

As roughly one in five Bosnians begins a second decade in displacement, it is important to recognize returns in their political, geographic context to understand the dynamics behind the statistics. As we have argued throughout this article, the returns process has been a long and protracted geopolitical power struggle across Bosnia's localities. The Bosnian war was not one involving Bosnia alone, but had regional and international vectors. Nor was it a singular event unfolding across the whole country, but rather a series of localized conflicts,

each with its regional dynamics of armed combat, ethnic cleansing, destruction, and postwar politics. It brought to power extreme nationalists who sought to reorganize Bosnia's integrated multiethnic geography into spatially segregated and purified ethnic territories through terror, expulsion, and murderous campaigns against ethnic others. The Dayton Peace Accords legitimated their crimes by awarding these leaders an internationally sanctioned subdivision of the country. Reigning supreme as the local authorities after the war, nationalist forces successfully blocked implementation of the Annex VII guarantee to return through violence, intimidation, and bureaucratic obstructionism. It was only after the international community slowly built the capacity and accumulated the power necessary to counter obstructionism through legal reforms that property repossession and minority returns were possible. Most importantly, the success of the returns process, albeit limited, required tremendous courage by ordinary Bosnians to return to devastated communities and rebuild their homes amid traumatic memories and hostile politics.

Still, the war continues over how Bosnia's territories and identities should be organized. Like much of Yugoslavia, some Bosnians confidentially express a mild Yugoslav nostalgia; a certain golden-hued reminiscence of the prewar peace and relative prosperity of brotherhood and unity. For most, however, the reality of the postwar period is nothing more than the frustration of unmet needs for reconstruction and recovery caused by continued political corruption and unresponsive institutions. As the international community lightens its footprint in Bosnia, there remains the faint glimmer of European Union membership—though perhaps a decade away. In Bosnia today, however, the nationalists who fought the war and profited tremendously from it remain local power brokers with little fear of meaningful prosecution. In many cases, they still hold elected office in Bosnia's local, entity, cantonal, and even state governments. Their cartographic fantasies to divide Bosnia into pure ethnonationalist territories did not succeed, however (Magaš 1993). Bosnia remains a multiethnic country, and diversity is still its abiding feature. Yet the apartheid project of the ethnonationalists, and the vicious war that resulted, broke apart an organic Bosnia, and no international intervention can put it back together in the same way (Mahmutćehajić 2000). Bosnia is a country transformed by war and displacement that continues to change as the uneven geography of returns creates new geopolitical dynamics across its diverse locales. Neither segregated nor integrated, neither failed state nor success story, the rebuilding of Bosnia remains a work in progress.

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Appendix 1: Glossary

ARBiH—*Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* [Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina].

Bosniak—Term used to describe culturally Muslim Bosnians regardless of religiosity.

DPA—Dayton Peace Accords.

Federation (of Bosnia-Herzegovina)—Controlled by Bosniak and Croat parties, one of two entities established by the Dayton Peace Accords.

HDZ—*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* [Croat Democratic Community].

HVO—*Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane* [Croat Defense Council].

IFOR—Implementation Force, peacekeeping mission 1995–1996.

JNA—*Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* [Yugoslav People's Army].

OHR—Office of the High Representative.

OSCE—Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Republika Srpska—The Serb Republic, one of two entities established by the Dayton Peace Accords.

SDA—*Stranka Demokratske Akcije* [Party of Democratic Action] (Bosniak).

SFOR—Stabilization Force, peacekeeping mission 1997–present.

SDS—*Srpska Demokratska Stranka* [Serb Democratic Party].

UNHCR—United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

VRS—*Vojska Republike Srpske* [Army of Republika Srpska].

Appendix 2: Primary Sources

Data

Base map: GISData. 2000. *Digital Atlas of Bosnia-Herzegovina*. 2000. Zagreb, Croatia: GISData.

Census of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1991: Gelo, J., M. Grizelj, and A. Akrap. 1995. *Stanovništvo Bosne i Hercegovine: Narodni Sastav po Naseljima* (Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina: National Structure by settlement). Zagreb, Croatia: Državni zavod za statistiku.

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Anwar Azimov, Senior Advisor, Head of Human Rights Department, OHR. Sarajevo. 5 July 2002.

Fadil Banjanović, Tuzla Canton Ministry for Refugees and DPs. Tuzla. 20, 24 June 2002.

Werner Blatter, Regional Coordinator for South-East Europe, UNHCR. Sarajevo. 4 July 2002.

Kathryne Bomberger, Deputy Chief of Staff, International Commission for Missing Persons. Sarajevo. 5 July 2002.

Emmanuelle Cerf, OSCE. Zvornik. 28 June 2002.

Saliha Djuderija, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. Sarajevo. 18 March 2004.

International Commission for Missing Persons staff. Sarajevo. 9 March 2004.

Yukiko Ishii, UNHCR. Tuzla. 11 March 2004.

Elmir Jahić, SDA, Zvornik council. Tuzla. 20 July 2002.

Mile Jović, Deputy Mayor, Zvornik. 12 March 2004.

Jusići MZ. Zvornik. 24 June 2002.

Amela Kreho, OHR, Annex VII Verification Unit. Sarajevo. 9 March 2004.

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Veronika Martelanc, OSCE. Zvornik. 15 March 2004.

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Jovan Mitrović, DNS (Democratic National Alliance [Serb ethnonationalist]). Zvornik council and RS Assembly. 19 July 2002.

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Jonathan Robinson, OHR. Zvornik. 19 June, 12 July 2002.

Stevo Savić, Mayor, Zvornik. 12 March 2004.

Dragan Spasojević, 19 December Corporation, Zvornik council. 24 June 2002.

Petar Spremo, OSCE, Zvornik, 28 June 2002.
 Nataša Stanković, Mercy Corps. Tuzla. 18 June 2002, 11 March 2004.
 Jonthan Stonestreet, OSCE Regional Centre Director. Tuzla. 25 June 2002.
 Jayson Taylor, Deputy Head of Department, RRTE. Sarajevo. 4 July 2002.
 Angelina Tomić, Chief of Zvornik Office, Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees. 17 July 2002.
 Dragomir Vasić, Zvornik council and Representative to Assembly of *Republika Srpska*. Zvornik. 17 July 2002.
 Mirhunisa Zukić, President, The Union of Refugees and Displaced Persons of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 18 March 2004.
 Zvornik Displaced Persons Association. Zvornik. 12 March 2004.
 Christine Zandvliet, OSCE. Sarajevo. 8 March 2004.

Notes

1. The estimated number of dead includes war-related deaths, the missing, and the higher mortality rate during the war. In the absence of a post-war census, there remains some debate over the number of deaths caused by the war and ethnic cleansing versus the general and indirect consequences of war's hardships on the civilian population (Burg and Shoup 1999, 169–71; UNDP 2002, 111–13).
2. The local political subdivision of Bosnia is the *opština* or *općina*, which is usually translated as “municipality.” We prefer the term “county,” however, since *opštini* comprise not only urban areas but their rural hinterlands. Before the war, Bosnia had 109 counties. The war and subsequent interentity boundary line split many counties, leaving the Federation with eighty and *Republika Srpska* with sixty-two.
3. Emplotment is the organization of facts, events, action, and protagonists so they become components of a particular story (White 1973). For a discussion of the emplotment of the Yugoslavian breakup, see Campbell (1998, 33–81).
4. By the mid-1970s, Bosnia had three constituent peoples or nationalities: Serb, Croat, and Muslim. As such, they had equal political rights in the republic, though the Yugoslav state did not recognize them as nations in the conventional sense. Moreover, the category “Muslim,” and later “Bosniak,” was understood as a broad cultural identity rather than a strictly religious one. In keeping with the contemporary practice among most Bosnian Muslims, we use the term Bosniak but use “Muslim” when this identity was used by our interviewees (as was common among Serb or Croat nationalists). Likewise, the role of religion in defining Orthodox Christians as “Serbs” and Catholics as “Croats” was officially limited in the Communist state. While these differences were not always unimportant, they were often less pronounced in urban areas (Bringa 1995, 1–36; Fine 2002).
5. The organization of the armed forces in operation at this time has been established at the ICTY and by reports issued in connection with United Nations’ investigations. The paramilitary forces included the *Arkanovci* commanded by Željko “Arkan” Ražnatović who appeared to take a lead role in coordinating the attack on civilians in these towns. Other forces included the *Chetniks* (“royalists” under the command of Serb Radical Party leader Vojislav Šešelj) and the *Beli Orlovi* (“White Eagles”). Local “Territorial Defense” civil militia units, organized and armed by the JNA, operated under Branko Grujić who took political control over the county (Cigar 1995).
6. This description is from the testimony presented by “Witness B-1524” during the trial of Prosecutor v. Milošević (IT-02-54). Transcript of 13 November 2003. The Hague: International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: 29,064–29,079 (available at www.un.org/transe54/031113E.htm).
7. It is misleading to describe the Bosnian war as an ethnic war since the motivation of many of the participants was not solely ethnonationalist. Criminality and plunder dovetailed with essentialized racist/ethnicist discourse to create a murderous cocktail. (On the economic dimensions of the Bosnian conflict, see Collier 2001; Pugh 2002; Andreas 2004).
8. One source puts the number of murdered in the first three months of the war in Zvornik at between 4,000 and 5,000 (RMAP 2003, 14). The United Nations Commission of Experts (1994b, c) collected eyewitness testimony describing twenty-three detention sites and numerous mass gravesites in Zvornik. Many of these bodies were disinterred and reburied in other locations near the end of the war to hide the evidence of the crimes. One such reburial site, Crni Vrh (Black Peak), was only recently excavated and is the largest single exhumation site in Bosnia to date, containing 483 complete bodies, 150 partial bodies, 198 body parts, and 122 related artifacts (Interview with members of the excavation team, International Commission for Missing Persons, Sarajevo, 18 March 2004).
9. There are many examples in Bosnia of this sort of banal nationalism as a territorializing act. Coffee in *Republika Srpska* is “Serbian coffee,” and one type of salad a “Serbian salad,” while their equivalents in the Federation are termed “Bosnian.”
10. The Bosnian war saw a dramatic expansion in the mandate of the UNHCR from refugee protection to serving as a quasigovernment structure administering the international relief effort for Bosnia. For a discussion of the moral complexities of the UNHCR's role see David Rieff's *A Bed for the Night* (2002, 123–54).
11. The term “minority returns” was adopted by the Peace Implementation Council (a intergovernmental conference that meets regularly to oversee the implementation of the DPA), even though some Bosniaks were returning to areas, like Zvornik, where they previously were a majority. See Ó Tuathail and Dahlman (2004b).
12. The base number of 42,962 Bosniaks in what is now Zvornik (less the Sapna area) was estimated by the authors using the 1991 census.
13. The prewar population of Jezero was about 2,450, comprising 1,400 Serbs, 780 Muslims, and 200 Croats. It was, of course, almost exclusively Serb after the war. By 2004, only 224 Muslims and 4 Croats had returned to Jezero.
14. As the successors to the Yugoslav Communist party, the ethnonationalist parties competed for separate spheres of total domination, first in trying to divide the country and then in local places (Burg and Shoup 1999, 46–61).

15. Many displaced Bosnian Croats eventually received entry and full citizenship rights in Croatia. Their rate of return has been much lower than for other displaced Bosnians.
16. Brčko remained so sensitive that its status was not determined at Dayton but given to a special arbitrator who finally awarded its control to a condominium of the Federation and Republika Srpska in 1999.
17. Durable solutions may include citizenship, refugee status recognition, permanent and temporary right to residence, or extended work permit.

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