

Divided Representation of World War II (1941–1945) and the War in Bosnia and Hercegovina (1992–1995): Women in Lašva Valley in Bosnia

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The attempt of this work is to present Lašva valley, region in Bosnia and Hercegovina with the majority of Croatian population during the Second World War and the recent war in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Lašva valley is presented through the eyes and narration of its own inhabitants, mostly women who were victims and witnesses of the Second World War and/or the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1992–1995. By avoiding victimization and romanticisation, this article has the aim to reconstruct the insights and experiences of two generations of Croatian women in Lašva valley. The war memories from Lašva valley are presented chronologically through their narratives. It is important to emphasize that the author was only interested in psychological traumas, due to the fact that this topic is so vast. Consequently, the other dimensions of life were overlooked and left for further research.

Key Words: WAR, VICTIMS, WITNESSES, WOMEN, DIFFERENT ARMIES, FORCED MEMORY, HIDDEN MEMORY, FORGETTING, REFUGEES, NATIONAL IDENTITY, REALITY, WOMAN'S ROLE AND POSITION, HISTORY

Introduction

Due to the numerous Balkan wars, there are lot of different maps of Bosnia, but very little is known about the inside maps of people living there. Therefore, inner mapping of the two latest wars is the task of this research. The author would like to focus experiences of particular group of women, how did they construct survival techniques during the Second World War and the recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hence, paper deals with detailed personal experiences of these two wars, as told by Croatian women from Lašva valley. The war memories from Lašva valley will be presented chronologically through their narratives. Consequently, the other dimensions of war memories were overlooked and left for further research.*

The research is defined as a study of memories of two wars among women from the particularly troubled multiethnic area in Bosnia and Herzegovina; it is based on three kinds of sources of information. Main resources of evidence were oral accounts and interviews of women in the area.¹ The paper has four parts.

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¹ Twenty one interviews were taken; see Table 1.

The first part of the paper offers an interpretation of World War II through the experiences of the ordinary people in Lašva valley. The accent is on specific women's memories and their inner perceptions of that war. There were many scenes, opinions, experiences and unpredictable descriptions of some events in the years of the Second World War that are discovered and seen in a new light. The anthropological analysis of testifying shows the relations between the personal experiences and the historical memory as well as the role of oral tradition and written sources. The unofficial memory existed outside of permitted public discourses and resulted in "conflicts of memory" (Burke, 1989:97-113).

The second part concerns the period between two wars, 1945-1991, when women were faced with various consequences of their relatives' involvement in movements during the war, and the third part focuses the recent war in Bosnia and Hercegovina. According to the testimonies of the people from Lašva valley, the events of World War II are not comparable with this "war which is not war," then mass killing at the end of twentieth century. The fourth part of the paper deals with the topic how women face the future of their valley.

The intention of this work is to present interviews of those Croatian women who found themselves in a completely new situation,² in tragic events that changed their lives forever. It compares the memories and amnesia of two different generations of women. Interviews with the people with such experiences require exceptionally complex and complete preparation. The author made interview with 21 women of different age. Ten of them survived the Second World War and the recent one, and are mostly housewives. Some of them are literate, some not. Younger women (11 of them) were with different family situation (married, single or widows), and they were born after World War II and know about it just through the memories of their family members, but their memories from the recent war were still fresh and painful. The author talked with these women while they were waiting for the humanitarian aid; in the hospitals, in the offices for social care or in the neighbourhood. The author found many difficulties in encouraging women to talk. They were confused, ashamed, not used to expressing their thoughts about war, much less to be recorded, or frightened to be misunderstood. They distanced themselves from this reality, the latter being something that should be forgotten as soon as possible. Older women were more relaxed in the interview and were much more willing to co-operate, "to help," as they said, than younger women. They were preservers of the specific women's memory and also surprised that someone showed an interest in their lives, which to them was common and uninteresting. "Life was difficult and we all attempted to manage some way to survive," commented one old woman without excitement and without intention to tell more about it.³ It can be illustrated through their narratives which reflect different experiences, social engagement and an unequal potentiality to contribute to the public discourse where confronting a social construction of war reality and the interpretation of recent events are still being created. This is the research about Croatian population in Lašva valley and this paper is just first step in the attempting to present this particular part of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the eyes of the Croats live there.

Three major resources of information were used: firstly, the author collected detailed personal experiences as oral sources as evidence. These information are not reliable enough; they are generally recorded many years after the events. Therefore, people attempted to forget their bad memories and unpleasant experiences while good things got an idealised shape. In spite of this methodological drawback, collected testimonies could be used as sources for sociological analyses of dispositions and accounts, and they offer wide field for interpretation

² Women from the second interviewed group who experienced the recent war in Bosnia and Hercegovina were not prepare to face the war. They never thought that such a situation could be reality. Women who survived the Second World War knew what war meant.

³ See Table. Interviewee No. 13.

inside relations of the group studied.⁴ Secondly, the author used diaries, which content people's feelings and fears at that time. They were good balance considering oral evidence. Women wrote diaries during the war because they were separated from their families or they felt the importance of that particular time.⁵

1. World War II and Croatian women in Lašva valley

The women's perception of the Second World War in Lašva valley focused their observation on the everyday life and events that may destroy their property. One woman kept in her memory the bombing of towns and the damage that resulted. She explained that she did not know who started the bombing and for what reason, but she emphasized that wealthy people and priests came to the village where she lived with her family. People did not feel safe in towns which were always the target of air attacking. She knew something was wrong, and she knew that she had to accept it, whatever it was. The women's definition of the war meant bombing and the consequences of it. They were witnesses a new process or event they never saw before. Thus, they started to get accustomed to it, to accept it without thinking. Anyway, nobody asked them for their opinion or feelings. Many soldiers passed through their houses and they were always there to serve them or protect their property.

It seems that population in Lašva valley accepted war as a destiny, as something what came without their wanting, but they also knew that they did not have any strength to stop it. They knew that roots of the war lied somewhere on the top and that they were far away of the state policy. Peasant's logic was: "Not to ask much, and try to save your life on the best way. Anywhere, we were never really hungry. We also helped others."⁶

The Germans in 1941 entered the occupied areas and challenged the common people's understanding and provoked astonishment leaving great visual impression that was confusing to the poor Bosnians. It was something strange for them who were not used to such "perfection." They never saw such an organised army. "I was sitting with my father on a terrace and watching the Germans entering. It was splendid. They were like dolls. All of them young men. Tankers in black suits and they had blond hair. They were 17-18 years old. All young and handsome."⁷ "How nice they were! My God! When they came on their motorcycles. All of them young as my grandsons and nice. They were giving us chocolate, and everything... We were not frightened by them. Why should we? If only God permitted that they stay here forever. Today's war would not happened." This old woman told this with nostalgia in her voice. She compared German soldiers with her grandsons⁸ and admired them. She never thought

⁴ For better understanding Oral History and its methodology, the author found particularly helpful the books: Thompson's *The Voices of the Past: Oral History* (1990), Tonkin's *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (1992), and Milich's *A Stranger's Supper: An Oral History of Centenarian Women in Montenegro* (1995).

⁵ Very few of the many book on World War II are about women (Elshtain, 1987) and Higonet's book: *Behind the Lines: Gender and Two World Wars* (1987), while many articles and several books were written about women during and after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mertus, 1997). Other books focused on Women's history provide excellent examples of women's life, thoughts, and culture, like *Memento* (Grebenaar, 1996). Grebenaar collected memories, narrations and testimonies of the people, mostly women, who worked in Nova Bila hospital and of some refugees and local people from the region. Also important were the War Reports from OMRI and other archives related to women and potential war crimes.

⁶ See Table. Interviewee No. 1.

⁷ The other woman remembrance. See Table. Interviewee No. 2.

⁸ Here she compares her memory from 1941, and that from 1997. Probably she was hiding her feelings from 1941 all these years, unconsciously. She was afraid to mention them before, during the Com-

about the Germans as occupiers,⁹ because she never thought about her life in that way. All soldiers were the same, she said, but the Germans were something special, not wild and unorganised like others. "Wars came and go. That is life that you have to live. It is God's will," she concluded.¹⁰

"The Germans were here in Lašva valley. They "overran"¹¹ us. I remember the Yugoslav officers¹² were running away from the Germans. The Germans attacked them and burned a Yugoslav tank. The officers and soldiers escaped from the tank and went to the forest. One officer came to us and asked for civilian clothes. He wanted to give us his watch for clothes. My father did not want to take anything. We gave him some old clothes and he went to the forest. And then, those people became partisans."¹³ Such a conclusion was a product of that time or influenced by a new history after the war. They did not recognise the differences between the armies. In fact, they could not tell them apart but they were passive towards them until the moment when they had to serve in one of them. At that time, the German army was the only really organized army which paid its soldiers and equipped them well. "There were several people from the local population in German army. They went as volunteers. For example, one our neighbour. As I see him now in the coach going to join German army. He was so proud."¹⁴ Therefore, German occupation meant escape from the poverty for these people in Lašva valley. According to interviewees, the fact that the Germans always chose Croatian houses for their temporary abode, also confirmed German attitudes towards the local Croatian population's habits of living; Croatian houses in Lašva valley were said to be "modest but clean."

1.1. Women Attitudes towards Different Armies in Lašva valley

After the fall of first Yugoslavia, Lašva valley – where Croatian ethnic group dominated – has seen several different armies. Thus, the local population became familiar with the Germans and their which included the Russians and Croats, with the Ustašas (Croatian and Muslim¹⁵ volunteers in the NDH – Independent State of Croatia¹⁶ army), the Domobrans (home defence soldiers who were regularly mobilised) and the Chetniks (local Serbs). All of

munist regime. It was forbidden to mention the Germans or their alliances in a positive way. But, during the interview, she suddenly found a way from her amnesia, talking about the Germans and comparing them with dear persons from her close life, discovering in that way her, for a long time, hidden sympathy for the Germans. Probably she did not notice that awaking.

⁹ Occupation did not mean for her that the Germans took this region by force. She did not think in that way. She did not even know a meaning of this word. She lived the usual life when the Germans came and she was faced with a foreigner. She probably heard about the Germans, but this was opportunity to see them. It was not a dramatic meeting, rather surprised and unexpected. Her life was changed. There was not a note of usual activities or customs in everyday life, because the Germans lived sometimes in her father's house, or used the stable. She met a new culture, and obviously she was not disappointed.

¹⁰ See Table. Interviewee No. 3.

¹¹ This expression is always present when she is talking about the Germans, even she felt sympathy towards them and was glad when they came.

¹² It was the Yugoslav Royal Army.

¹³ See Table. Interviewee No. 8.

¹⁴ See Table. Interviewee No. 4.

¹⁵ In that time a big number of Muslims felt like a part of the Croatian people, together with their numerous intellectuals, like historian Kreševljaković, writers Bašagić, Čatić Kikić, Nametak, etc. (Ivanković, 1993:50)

¹⁶ NDH is the abbreviation for Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia). The Muslims were in a majority in this NDH units, the Ustašas, as the Croats stated through their testimonies.

them were settled in a small space of Lašva valley. Local people “had heard rumours” about the partisans, but they were not present in this region at the beginning of the war.

According to sources, each army wanted to take Kaonik or Stanica,¹⁷ because of its strategic importance as a cross-roads between Travnik, Zenica, Busovača and Kiseljak. During the war, the place changed hands many times, depending on “military successes.” People remembered when the partisans took this place in 1944, and stayed there just three days. Their Headquarters was in a Croatian house near the bridge. “The Germans came suddenly in armored vehicles. They knew that the partisans had just small weapons and decided to “jump in” the enemies area. The partisans were surprised and they had to run away in a panic. They left one good and nice horse in my father’s stable. My father let it go. He said that it would be a pity if they kill a horse.”¹⁸ Through the memories of the inhabitants of Lašva valley, it can be noticed that they were used on the presence of different armies and which army they preferred. Last sentence from the quote proved their ironique standpoints towards the partisans. In the same time, their admiring of German strength was illustrated by the description of their capability to expel partisans from their stronghold.

When the partisans attacked Busovača for the first time, in December 1942, on Christmas Eve, they lost, but they stayed around the town. They had many losses. One male interviewee remembered that they wanted to bury their dead soldiers in a Serbian grave-yards but the local Serbs did not allow that, because the dead partisans were Catholics, mostly Dalmatians and Istrians. “The Dalmatians made elite units of partisans”. This and their large number in National Liberation Army was explained by the fact that they lost their own territories on the coast, due to an agreement between Mussolini and Pavelić.¹⁹ Dalmatian and Istrian units of NLA fought in each major battle against the Germans in Bosnia.²⁰

According to one interviewee: “As Bosnia was under the NDH, the Muslims were with the Croats during the war. They were mostly in Ustašas Army. They stayed in Ustaša’s movement until, approximately, 1943, and they did what they did on Drina river as the Ustašas, in the Croat name... [Today’s events are revenge for this]. But, in the name of Croatia. And then what? When the German offensive against Russia was broken in 1943, the Germans started to withdraw from Russia. There was a change of policy in 1943 to 1944. They [Muslims] went slowly from Ustašas and Domobran units to the partisans. They went over to the partisans. And then, they betrayed the Croats. When the war was finished, 20-30 Croats [mostly young men] were pushed out from Busovača, the same number or more from Vitez, Travnik and Bučići²¹ and were liquidated in Kiseljak. The brother of one local Muslim from Busovača made the list. I think 31 Croats. Nobody even touched them [Muslims] here during World War II. They were always *prilivode*.²² There were not many victims in their units. No, no.”²³

¹⁷ During the Austro-Hungarian time, the railway was built and in place Kaonik was the railway station and cross-road of the all roads. Thus people called that place Stanica-Station.

¹⁸ See Table. Interviewee No. 5.

¹⁹ Pavelić gave almost all Istria and Dalmatia to Mussolini to ensure his own position and his state.

²⁰ It was a famous battle where Tito was wounded. Many glorified stories were written about it. The partisans were presented as heroes in school books, history books and in a movie that appeared later, together with many others which topic was glory of Partisan’s fighting. School children had to go to the cinema to see these films. It was obligatory part of their education during the Communist period.

²¹ Original name of Novi Travnik is Bučići. The communists changed this name.

²² *Prilivode* is an old folk expression for the people who change sides whenever it is convenient or profitable.

²³ Male interviewee, 70 years old. He finished secondary school at that time and was respected in his family and in the valley. He was from wealthy family, but today he still lived in the same house, which was the best house in the village before. Now, it is almost ruined, but a ruin that survived the wars.

It could be argued that both male and female inhabitants of Lašva valley were observers looking on that stage of “warriors.” Their way of narrating is very significant. They did not show sympathy towards the partisans. They were supposed to see them as National Liberation Army, but they laughed when somebody mention the serious role of the partisans. Namely, they felt them as one more army whose aims of fighting they did not understand. They were interested in things which influenced the changes in their lives. “The Germans did not maltreat local population. They were in our house during one winter. There were Russian soldiers, but under German officers control. They were slaves, the prisoners of the Germans. The Russians captured German soldiers and our people there²⁴, and then the Germans captured the Russians, took them here and they fought against the partisans, they had to. That was it. Well, that was chaos. During that winter, 40 soldiers, Russians, were in my house, there in the house of my father. They spent the winter. In the stable were many horses, God knows how many!²⁵ The Germans never stole anything from us. If they did not have things to give us, they did not take from us. They never raped women. They were correct and polite,” said one 68 years old woman from Lašva valley. Another emphasized: “Once the Germans were settled in our house. They always behaved decently. But this time, there was one German soldier in our house who was interested in my older sister. He attempted to get her out of the house. Probably he wanted to rape her, but my father noticed that and he protested to the German officer. He said rather to kill him! They were not so nice sometimes. I think, they were nice at the beginning, but after, they were not for commendation. They became familiar with local people as every army...” [Ustašas, Domobrans, and after partisans].²⁶

During the War 1941-1945, women were in charge of domestic duties. They watched over the world and war events through the eyes of their male members in the family. It is possible to show that women had secondary roles in the family, were the keepers of memories, sharp judges and generators of small things which just seemed unimportant. In their narration, they emphasized one of the many characteristics of the soldiers without judgement in their voice, just wonder. To prove that men and women did not differ between armies and they did not pay special attention to any of them, one woman told a funny story about the partisans and their “task to liberate the people”: “One old woman lived alone in the house. Late in the night someone knocked on her door. She asked who was it. They answered that they are the National Liberation Army. She said: *Come, come, my sons. I thought that you are lousy partisans!*”

According to sources, Croats at that time had higher percentage of literate people in comparison with Serbs and Muslims, but they were equally not informed what was going on in Bosnia and the world during this time (Fišić, 1978). There were no newspapers or radios in mostly rural areas of Bosnia. People in the towns had radios, but this meant nothing for the people in the villages. If some wealthier peasant had a radio, male and female members of that village used to gather around it and listen, but such examples were not frequent. They even were not allowed to go to the church, because public gatherings were forbidden and a

²⁴ The Croats in German army.

²⁵ A horse was animal of a great price and use. Who had horse could considered himself as a “rich” man. He was in advanced position compare with others. Horse was used to pull wooden peasant car and fiacres, to plough fields, to carry heavy burden, etc.

²⁶ See Table. Interviewee No. 8. This woman did not mention the way how her sister behaved or what she thought about this German soldier's attemptation. Probably it could be explained by their family's education and female role in the house. Again, it is important to stress the patriarchal character of the society. It would be a big scandal if he would rape her. Her life would be destroyed and nobody would not want her to be his wife. She would be stamped for the rest of the life. Father tried to prevent this and defend her with his own life. Obviously that soldier was not aggressive or he was scared by his commander who did not want to spoil a good relationship with the local population. Fortunately, this story had happy end.

special permission from the Germans was required. The people did not know what were happening in other parts of the country and who is in which army. They knew they had to survive. A black market appeared and the valuable things became flour, salt, potatoes, and meat. Men remembered those black marketers and they emphasized that they passed goods under any regime. They just "changed their clothes" (Kocaj, 1993:8).²⁷

1.2. *Between two Wars: Fear and Uncertainty*

After the Second World War, a number of Croatian women from Lašva valley were put in prison, because their fathers, uncles, husbands, or boyfriends were involved with nationalistic movements (See Katavić, 1993). Women were suspected that they brought food to the people who hid in the forest (*šumnjaci*), the rest of soldiers who did not know where to go when the partisans took the power (Katavić, 1993:10-11).²⁸ Some people were hidden in their houses, but in the end they would find them and put them in prison.²⁹ After the retreat of the Germans, a number of local soldiers who served in their army or in their alliance units were missing. Women assumed that they were prisoners of the partisans somewhere, if they were not killed before on the front-line. They did not know exactly their destination, and were frightened to ask. Some songs, popular at the time, evidenced their anxiety: "Oj, mašino kad ćeš Mariboru, dragi mi je tamo u logoru!" (O, train when will you go to Maribor, my darling is there in the camp!). Or: "U logoru od željeza vrata, tamo imam dragana i brata." (In the camp the doors are made of iron, my darling and brother are there).

SUBNOR³⁰ and Socialist Union of Working People in Vitez never recognized those Croats people from Zaselje as victims of Fascist terror and it was forbidden to mention that event at all. A Communist asked: "How could it happen that the Croats around Vitez be recognized as victims of the Fascist terror?" (Stipović, 1993:3). One interviewee, former Ustaša's officer (85 years old) said that the partisans had lists of the local people and description of their activities in army. They found his name on the list and commented: "Yes, you are on the list, but you did not do violence. And, I see that the Serbs from the village said good things about you, they praised you." (Kocaj, 1993:8).

According to interviewees, it can be assumed that the Serbs were asked for their opinion in such cases. It was a well-known policy among population of Lašva valley. Due to one source (Kocaj, 1993:8), Croats were stigmatized by statements: "You made enough evil here, and we have to observe you and to clean from your heads even a trace of pride." According to sources, people of Lašva valley could not understand such a policy towards them just because they were Croats. If they knew that the partisans would kill them, they would never re-

²⁷ One man from Vitez (85 years old), narrated that the black market was the best profit in war time. When there were neither one cup of salt in Vitez, he went to Tuzla and blackmarketed 10 tones of salt. He sold one wagon full of cylinders for gas-lamps in Zenica. He also blackmarketed tobacco. He proudly commented that those who had money had power. He could buy the doctors, their medical statement that he was not capable to be in army, or bribe his captain. He was accused and tried for that, but he succeeded to solve even this problem in a "usual way," using money.

²⁸ A women spent three years in prison, because she were helping "šumnjaci" - Croatian soldiers. She came out from prison in 1951. Her husband disappeared after 1945, during withdrawing and she never saw him again. He was in Croatian army. She stayed alone with her daughter who was also judged for three years of prison, but she exited earlier. She was "voluntarily" pushed out to brigade on Romania mountain for two months.

²⁹ One man who was in Ustaša's units was hidden in his house in Vitez almost 7 years. They found him and put in prison. He met his future wife in prison. She was there because of her fiance Luburić, who was one of the leaders of Ustaša's units, as they remembered.

³⁰ League of the Fighters of National Liberation War.

port to them. But they still did not believe that such executions were done. According to one source (Higonnet, 1987:67) individual memories assumed to be more important and therefore became certain political force and danger. A man who survived Bleiburg narrated: "I really do not know where we moved any more. I just remembered that we were exhausted and hungry. When we were passing through Serb villages, they beat us, and they killed weaker prisoners. It was horrible! We were going from camp to camp, exhausted, dirty and sick. In each camp they interrogated us. Our numbers became smaller and smaller. They maltreated us in every way. When we were passing through the Croatian villages, women threw breads to us. It presented the most beautiful thing for us. I state now that more people were killed after the surrender than during four years of war."³¹ When prisoners came to Slavonki Brod, one female partisan, a political Commissar made an appropriate speech, wanting to get them on their side. Women were respected in the partisans and fanatic followers of Communist ideology. Sometimes, they were worse than the men in searching for the "enemies" or in proving that the partisans were fighting for the right things. Many of them were proclaimed as war heroes. According to source (Milić, 1993) after the war, women got the right to vote, to be independent, to go to schools.³² These were women on one side. But, on the other side, were women whose husbands, or cousins were on the "opposite side." They were waiting people from Bleiburg's Way of the Cross, they suffered together with them, and their destiny. They were told not to remember partisan violence. It was taboo and out of question. This was the way the new "democratic" country started, with its rule based on force, death and injustice.

Once on power, the Communists created a new history, wanting to present the National Liberation war as a heroic act full of patriotism and positive tensions without any negative views. It was a "policy of memory." Almost all official holidays were focused on the memories of World War II. The Communist party ordered what should be remembered and forgotten. Memories were continually being recreated. Everything was focused on the superiority of the partisans over others. The role of partisan opponents was ignored or shown in a bad light, while the question of partisan violence was suppressed (Hopken, 1997). There was no "original" and therefore correct memory. Analysing collective memory as significant issue in the fight for power among social forces, Le Goff emphasized: "To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies. The things forgotten or not mentioned by history reveal these mechanisms for the manipulation of collective memory." (Le Goff, 1992:54).

Memories of the War and its historiography were constructed through the educational policy which was wholly in the hands of the Communist party in each republic. The impor-

³¹ A man who survived Bleiburg narrated his sad story and is still surprised that he stayed alive. He was 17 in the Fall in 1943. He had to signified himself to the military office because of evidence. He went alone to Travnik where he met Zeir Tuco and his son Smail (Muslims). When Zeir saw that officers were ready to send him back home, and that his father was not with him, he changed him for his son. Thus, he became a Croatian soldier at his 17. When war was finished and he came to Vitez, after many years in prison, he had to report to military department of new government. The military referent was Kadir Tuco (Muslim). In his office sat some partisan's officers. When Kadir saw him, he started to sing: "Who tells, [swear words], that Ustaša does not come back home." This man was frozen with fear, but these partisans did not pay attention to him.

³² Andelka Milić. "Women and Nationalism in the Former Yugoslavia." *Gender Politics and Post Communism*, 1993:111. Yugoslavia was the only country in communist Eastern Europe in which constant feminist movement grown through the several different phases of its development. The most important fact for women's consciousness in Yugoslavia was their participation in the partisan struggle in World War II. After the war, Yugoslav society had made significant move toward redefinition the relations between the sexes on the principle of egalite. But, it was not long-standing process. Despite of all their equal fighting during the war, women still remained subordinated in all spheres of life.

tance of World War II was the essence of political legitimacy of the Communist party which did not allow the educational system to be democratic or to present a different representation of any event if it was not directed by the leadership. The picture that was always presented was from a "ethnic-perspective," as the partisans fighting against the bourgeoisie (the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian one), ignoring the fact that the war was a civil war as well, having an ethnic dimension. The bourgeoisie was responsible for ethnic violence and war crimes. Nobody was allowed to mention partisan crimes which did occur. The party saw itself as the protector brotherhood and unity wanting to avoid antagonisms between different nations (Hopkens, 1997). The results of such an attempt was forced memory, not allowing the people to express their own remembrance. People had to suppress memories for four decades. The explosion of such a suppression was used in the recent war by national ideologies and resulted with political warfare.

It has been demonstrated that Lašva valley was in the cross-road of history. This valley represented mixture of different ethnic groups that stamped this region with their own specific characteristic and differences. Such a situation challenged reality with differences in culture, language, religion, and traditional customs. The modernization and development of the Valley between two wars could be clearly illustrated by the construction of the rail-road; it presented a mark of a progress and prosperity, but it was not enough to bridge the differences among the nations that were never completely accepted but were tolerable.

2. The War in Lašva Valley (1992-1995)

"Lašva valley in Central Bosnia and Herzegovina, stretches from Travnik in the north-west to Busovača in the south-east and includes Dubravica, Nova Bila and town Vitez. According to the peace plan proposed by the negotiators of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia, the valley would be under the Croat administration. The population of this proposed province is predominantly Croat, but in many parts of the Lašva valley region, Muslims constitute a majority. This is particularly the case with the city of Travnik, which would be the provincial capital. Its pre-war population was 45.3 per cent Muslim, 36.9 per cent Croat and 16.8 per cent others. Muslim residents of the city and the surrounding areas are reported to be extremely reluctant to accept a Croat administration. For example, a recent attempt to replace the flag³³ of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the flag of the so-called Croat Community of Herzeg-Bosnia on all government buildings in Travnik led to considerable tension and violence." (Mazowiecki, 1992/93:16-17).

2.1. Fall of Jajce (October 30, 1992)

Home is for many the supreme sanctuary, sacred beyond its material importance. It represents family, birth place, identity and privacy. "...Loss of home is more tragic than loss of homeland" (Povrzanović, 1993:138). Pushing people from their homes leaves a deep and tragic legacy. People are afraid of the future. They are not used to depending on the mercy of others. They suddenly find themselves in such a situation, and could not manage it. Feelings of anger and humiliation, helplessness, injustice, disappointment and misery were a part of everyday. People who were still in their homes were afraid of facing these homeless people.

³³ The previous flag of Socialist Republic Bosnia and Herzegovina were abandoned by Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They chose new one with lilies which became Muslim national symbol, which Croats never accepted even though lilies as symbols were taken from the flag or coat of arms of the Bosnian king Tvrtko. The Bosnian Croats had their flag with Croatian national symbols, red and white fields which was similar to the flag of Croatia, but not the same. It was the flag of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia.

Their imagination created the same destiny for themselves and they were ready to believe in it. Rumours³⁴ were rampant and spread panic among many scared people. According to one interviewee:

“Jajce³⁵ fell. First, it was just rumours, but now, people are coming every day. Last night 4.500 people from Jajce came to Vitez. Today I could see them here, in Busovača. Their eyes were full of questions and unbelieving. Although they were suffering in Jajce under constant fire, they hoped it would pass and they would stay in their homes. They did not expect such an end and refused to accept it. In each war people had to pay the price of policy.”³⁶ People from Lašva valley were disappointed and worried when Jajce fell on October 30, 1992. Hundreds of people were passing day after day, night after night through Lašva valley. It was raining. They were exhausted. Lašva valley was a salvation for them. They could not even know that people from towns and villages they were passing through were in so black a mood and with the worst thoughts in seeing them. They saw themselves in these people. Deep in their mind was the thoughts and questions of the reason for this human suffering. One woman protested: “It is insolent from all those politicians to play games with people! They sold a town, but it is not just stone. People make a town alive, not walls! And what now?”³⁷ Some people felt pangs of conscience looking at these poor people without a roof over the head. They still had homes, but for how long? Suspicion was everywhere. People from Jajce thought they had a place of salvation but the local people knew that there was no escape from there. They were in shock and collective distress. But, women did not have time to think about tomorrow. They had to find accommodations, food and clothes for the refugees. The majority of the people from Jajce were walking during the shelling and shooting. Their shoes were worn.³⁸ “This event [the fall of Jajce] is horrible! It is fatal for the people, for their spirit. What kind of people shall we be after the war? What kind of horror is ahead of us? Could we even predict the finish of this terrible time,” asked one woman scared by people's stories from Jajce.

The refugees noticed the complete absence of any organisation in Jajce. The day was as every other. Shelling and shooting all the time was the usual event during the last months. They were informed about withdrawing suddenly, without expectation. They experienced unexpected suffering during the horrible march finding themselves in a night mare. Fear and disbelief were in every eye. Even when they came to a safe place, they could not believe that they had left their homes behind. They tried to recall all things dear to them and not forget. They still were in a shock. Older people pushed out from their villages missed their cattle, forests, and meadows. Each sentence began, “I do not know... What could I say... I missed

³⁴ In wartime period, rumours were wide-spread among people who were directly involved in the war's events. Mostly the sources for rumours were TV and Radio news of all three sides that people heard and they transmitted them always added some new details. There was constant rumour that Lašva valley will not be able to defend itself and that was just a question of a day when Serbs will occupy the area. As the result of such a prognosis, people had the suitcases with the main things ready during the all period of war. In the same time, they never thought that Muslim would attack them.

³⁵ Jajce was the royal town of Bosnian kings. The last Bosnian king Stjepan Tomašević was beheaded in Jajce by Ottomans, in 1467. In this town was agreed the Constitution of Yugoslavia, on 29. 11. 1943. This town was attacked by JNA and paramilitary Serbian units. Town was under the siege. The Croats and the Muslims defended it together. When this town was occupied by the Serbs, people left to Travnik, Vitez, Busovača and Zenica. The Croats mostly came to Busovača and Vitez, and the Muslims mostly stayed in Travnik or proceeded to Zenica.

³⁶ N.N. Unpublished diary.

³⁷ See Table, Interviewee No. 17.

³⁸ Their feet were bloody because of so many hours of walking. They went to an ambulance to get medical care. Local people gave them their shoes and clothes.

my old chair, my dog. What does it do now? Poor animal! I left it to keep the house..." These were days of total amnesia, and despair. Nevertheless, women refugees had no time for such questions. They had to adjust to the new situation and help children in their adaptation to a new environment, even though they felt lost.

2.2. *The Fall of Travnik (June, 1993)*

On April 1992, Travnik was attacked by Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and members of Serbian paramilitary units who were in the mountain Vlašić above the town. The Croatian population of this town organized itself for defence forming Croatian Council of Defense (HVO) units. They were established to defend the valley from the Serbs. During the one hard fight, the members of Serb army captured 13 HVO's members and massacred them in a very brutal way. The Serb army attacked and took under their command nine villages in the region of Travnik municipality. People from these villages (the Croats and the Muslims) escaped to Travnik. During the next months in 1992, small conflicts between the Croats and the Muslims in Travnik broke out. In 1993, all of these misunderstanding and violences³⁹ resulted in open conflict which led to pushing out all the Croats from the town and surrounding villages. Some Croats attempted to flee over territory occupied by the Serbs, over the mountain Vlašić. The Serbs allowed them to pass, but they took male members of families in camp Manjača, and women were free to go with children. People who lived on the other side of town, went to Nova Bila, Vitez, and Busovača (CPD, 1997).

"If we lived so many years with Muslims and Serbs in the same country, how is it that now this country does not belong to us, as well," asks one old woman, a refugee from Guča Gora, a well known place in Bosnia because of its Franciscan monastery which was burned during the World War II by the partisans. In spite of the difficult life in the after-war period, the Croatian inhabitants lead by their parish priest Ivo Marković succeeded in rebuilding the monastery.⁴⁰ On June 8, 1993 at 4.00 a.m. the Muslims⁴¹ attacked the village of Čukle in the Travnik municipality. The population in this village was mixed, Croatian and Muslim. A month before the attack of the Muslim forces, interviewees said, the Croats were forbidden to go out of the village and the local Muslims did not want to talk to them. A woman 55 years old, was in the cellar with three Croats (one woman 80 years old and two men). When the shelling stopped, they tried to escape, she said, but they were caught by the uniformed local Muslims and *mujahedeens*. According to her, they put them in front of a wall twice intending to execute them, but both time they changed their minds. It was psychological torture, to scare them by the prospect of execution. Her husband lost his legs when he stepped on a

³⁹ CPD, Sarajevo, 1997. p. 42-46. Members of the ABiH used to come to Croatian houses and take the money or other valued things. They were burning Croatian flags, killing Croatian women and men in their flats or on the roads. On April, 1993, two members came by force in the house where lived alone a Croatian woman (57 years old). They threatened her by knives, took her money and raped her. They were about 30 years old.

⁴⁰ Stojan Miloš. *Od Bučića do Beča (From Bučići to Vienna)*. (Vitez, 1994). p. 54-55. On February, 1945, the partisans burned Catholic monastery in Guča Gora and it was burning by days, because they did not allow local population to stop the fire. They said that many partisans were killed there and it should be burned to the foundation. In its rich history, this monastery was firstly a school, then a Franciscan Gymnasium, and novitiate. Fire destroyed the whole monastery and the church. It also destroyed a very rich library, archives, and a gallery of very valued foreign paintings. The liturgical garments, a bishop's crosier and the stamp of Lašva's Franciscan monastery were lost for ever. It was one of the most beautiful churches in Bosnia which were painted by Marco Antonini. The same tragedy hit this monastery and church in the recent war.

⁴¹ She called them Muslims in her report.

mine and they killed him. She pointed out that they forced them to listen their religious music before the execution while they were waiting. In spite of the scare, she kept asking for help from people she knew, but they turned their heads. They killed two Croats at that place. She was in prison with three women for one month. The Muslims were coming during night and threatening women saying that they will kill all Ustašas (CPD, 1996).⁴²

Women could hardly admit that such a situation was real. One interviewee was constantly trying to find some Muslims she knew to ask them for help. She refused to believe that they were on the side of the enemies. She asked one neighbour to help her husband. She experienced torture, fear and hopelessness. When she was standing before the wall and knew that they intended to kill her, she just said: "We are not guilty."⁴³ She could not understand the reasons for such behaviour. They called her Ustaša, but she did not identify herself with this name, neither did she link it with this horrible situation.

Travnik fell. People who watched Croatian TV⁴⁴ were in shock and did not want to believe. Some of them felt that the circle was narrower every day more and more. Rumours again started as the result of this tragic news.⁴⁵ Collective fear and panic were widespread. People felt bitterness because of the situation. They accused the Muslim soldiers for their attacks against small Croatian enclaves instead of going to save Žepa and Srebrenica. People felt that international media broadcasted about tragic events in these towns every night while the fighting in Lašva valley did not interest them. Therefore, the world media did not inform about "a different picture they would made about the Muslims." One interviewee said: "Defeat of Travnik completely broke me and my son is still there in the hospital. I feel as though I have become crazy. This closed area and a tense situation were no longer tolerable. The thought that they could push us out from here is present all the time. I can not stand it any more." These are words of one woman whose son (17 years old) was wounded and sent to the hospital in Travnik, before the defeat of Travnik. He stayed there under the Muslim occupation.⁴⁶ Many rumours abound about the destiny of Croats in this hospital. She just heard that he is there under a Muslim name, for his own safety. The information that Travnik fell resounded in the rest of Lašva valley as a sign of disaster. People in Nova Bila, Novi Travnik,

⁴² Centar za prikupljanje dokumentacije (CPD) (Center for Collecting Documentation). Sarajevo, 1997.

⁴³ This 55 years old women could not understand such a behaviour of her neighbours. To defend herself she repeated that she was not guilty, not knowing what was her fault. She knew that punishment existed to warn on bad things but she was not aware of any mistake she did. She was not burdened by past events which were not familiar with to her and distanced herself from them.

⁴⁴ Media were one of the sources of information. People hardly waited to hear the news if they were lucky and had electricity. Radio and TV were the main link with other part of country. People used to subordinate all daily activities to Television or Radio news. They endeavourly listen to it and after analysing what they heard with other people. The media were also tools for denying false information or for stopping rumours.

⁴⁵ There talked about mujahedeens who wore turbans on the heads and had knife in the teeth. They were skilled to kill people on a brutal way. Deep fear was rooted among people, because of these wild soldiers who hated a Cross and non-believers (Christians) and were ready to die for Islam. During the attacking they screamed, "Allah Agbar!" One HVO soldier who faced them during the battle, told the similar stories about them.

⁴⁶ Before the war district county Travnik was the biggest in canton of "Central Bosnia." It had the greatest population and also the biggest area. According the list from 1991, Travnik had 70.747 inhabitants: 26.118 Croats (37%), 31.813 Muslims (45%), 7.777 Serbs (11%) and 5.039 others (7%). Almost 20.000 Croats was chased away from their homes; 600 Croats were killed (men, also women, children and old people); around 1200 were injured. Muslim refugees from West Bosnia (30.000) came to Travnik and stayed there till today. The more powerfull brigade of ABiH, 17 Krajiška was formed by these refugees. Thus, the term occupation could be used here by purpose.

Vitez and Busovača thought that they will be the next target of the Muslim offensive, but the knowledge that they had no way out from the valley, forced them to stay and to defend themselves and their families.

It seems that women are supposed to be keepers of "normal" life in place surrounded by the enemy, during the shelling, bombing and total chaos. They had to cope with this violence of a men's war. According to them, men expected them to be strong, to replace them in the families, to accept the new situations. Nobody asked them as mothers, wives, sisters, and girls for their opinion. Probably their answer would not be in line with official, public opinion. Their pain because of missing or wounded family members, loss of property, loss of a sense of life, and impossibility to adopt to the new situation amounted to the experience of violence. "When one speaks about war violence against women, non-sexual violence is usually forgotten. The loss of social connections, the difficulties of fulfilling the most basic needs of safety, shelter and food whilst caring for children and the elderly can also be devastating" (Belić, 1995:33). As Julie Mertus clearly stated: "Civilisation's progress in the twentieth century has betrayed them [women] as did Titania's love potion: victims of rape, torture, genocide, starvation, the brutality of watching their children and loved ones killed and tortured, and other acts of physical and mental war violence" (Mertus, 1997:14). Women in Lašva valley were those who motivated people, who did not allow the feeling of pessimism to inundate their minds. They organised war schools in the houses, collected clothes, shoes and other things for refugees, and included refugees in these actions to give them opportunity to meet others and became familiar with the local people. They went to hospitals to visit wounded people. "I had no time to be afraid. There were many people who needed my help."⁴⁷ Again, they were in a situation of repairing war's consequences, trying to understand and to find a way out of the sick panicked atmosphere which overtook the valley. The burden of responsibility for human lives was on their backs. One interviewed woman said: "I refused to listen to the Radio, because I knew that all three sides were guilty and that people on the top, who lead these peoples do not know what they want. They input hatred to the people, and thank God, everybody knows very well, that there are many people who do not think with their own head."

Women found themselves in a completely new situation. They had to give birth in improvised hospital which was in a Nova Bila, on church grounds. It was just one room for all of the women. There was no privacy. The same day, after the birth, they had to leave the hospital, because of the lack of space, but also because of security. The hospital was often the target of shelling. Apart from deaths in this improvised hospital without the necessary instruments, new life also came. This gave strength and hope. Nurse, 39 years old remembered how difficult was to establish a hospital in the church: "I still heard cry and screams of mothers, wives and sister for their deads. I always consolidated with people suffering, especially with sick children, or worse, wounded children, what was often case in this war. So many children were pushed out from their childhood, and games. So many became invalids without one or both legs, without hand, or fingers, or with many others difficult injuries. I had to face all these tragedies, but continued to work and sustained. I remembered when a mother and son [four years old] were wounded, and daughter was lost during the fleeing" (Grebenaar, 1996:33). Women came to Nova Bila hospital to work voluntarily. They wanted to help in any way, to be useful, not to be just helpless figures. Thus, one woman, a teacher, came to the hospital to be a cleaning lady that was not easy duty in such a situation. She saw human suffering, wounded soldiers lying on wooden benches, wounded civilians, children... She talked to these people, trying to give them hope, faith, and strength to survive. She closed the eyes

⁴⁷ See Table. Interviewee No. 1 and No. 12. Women organised mutual cooking for refugees. They helped in searching for a place for these people who were still in shock.

to several of her pupils, she took care of some of them, consoled and encouraged them, feeling at the same moment that she could break from the pain, but she had to be brave before them. She emphasized that all these impressions left a profound trace on her soul, but she had to continue to work, to help her people: "I watched these early matured faces, pains, suffering, wounds, cut legs and hands and was not able to help them. I returned then in my thoughts in the school's benches and compared those careless and innocent children faces with these physically and psychically exhausted faces of adult people yet. Then, I would damn this dirty war again and again, for a thousand times. All of these days are a mixture of sorrow and happiness. All of these months are meetings with different human destinies which could not be described in one day. I am finding happiness in a grateful look, in smile on a tearstained face... Love initiated me, and I am taking strength from God's love. I live with my people and suffer their destiny" (Grebenaar, 1996:45). The personnel in the improvised hospital in Nova Bila were in a similar but more complex situation. They established this hospital in a short period, because all other hospitals were in towns under the Muslim control and according to interviewees, the Croats were not welcome there. "Muslims knew that the Croats had no hospital and that they had to send their wounded soldiers to Muslim hospitals where they would not be accepted. Thus, they thought that we would be fed up after some refused soldiers and would have to stand under their command. Their leading doctors and personal commented, "I would like to see a hospital with ten doctors!" (Grebenaar, 1996:20-21). But the Croatian hospital had just three surgeons at the beginning as well as several doctors of general practise. Talking about instruments, the personnel of this hospital explained that it was easier to say what they had than what they missed. Apart from its medical importance, this hospital had great symbolic meaning to the people of all Lašva valley. It was a symbol of survival and hope. People believed just in the "hospital" as the only safe place that never ignored their needs.⁴⁸

Women were in humanitarian organisation, or in the "Civil defence"⁴⁹ organisation. They organised a humanitarian organisation titled "Majka i dijete" (Mother and child) and this organisation was a mediator between the international humanitarian organisation focusing on children and family needs, and the people in Lašva valley. To stop a panic among people and to create a situation of normality, similar to the previous way of life, women organised cultural activities such as an art exhibition, Presentation of women's handiwork, Poets' evenings, Christmas celebrations, etc. They encouraged women refugee to come and sing in the choir that existed before the war and was a part of the Croatian Cultural Association "Napredak". Women mostly were members of this association, and they also led it. Thus, women from Guča Gora and Putiš had the opportunity to sing songs that they remembered to their lost villages and to see each other in one place, to exchange the information about their new way of life, to help each other with advice or just to talk.⁵⁰ Women also worked in the Radio Stations and as journalists in the local newspaper. They were informing citizens every day about recent events and the situation on the front lines. Their work was very suc-

⁴⁸ On the same place was the church and place where people could get food. Thus, priest once said that house was always full as the Train Station. The worst situation was during the big offensive of ABiH when people from 50 villages around Travnik, Zenica and Vares had to be moved in a 1-2 days. All of them were passing through or towards Nova Bila. Large panic was appeared and nobody even the bullets to the leaders of fleeing could not stop. One man burned his house and followed the lost "mass." But, when he saw that nobody else from Nova Bila left, he came back to the still warm stake of his house.

⁴⁹ "Civil defense" is civilian organisation for helping people during the natural catastrophe, or the war. Women also worked in local organisation of Red Cross. They were in a majority because male were on a frontlines. In the organisation "Majka i dijete" worked the widows.

⁵⁰ Most of them were settled on different places, and they could not freely walk around, because of shelling.

cessful and it made them feel good. They were useful and this work allowed them to provide information in an attempt to defeat rumours. "I was afraid of spiritual poverty through this war. I exchanged books that I had with other women and my children are aware of the power of written word. They used to read, following my example and this was useful for them to escape just for a while from the reality, as they admitted."⁵¹

Majority of victims, on all warring sides in Bosnia, were women. Everywhere the war raged, and they mostly suffered in silence. Some of them kept their sorrow inside, sitting all the time in cellars. Sometimes, they would say, they were awakened from this state when the pain was stronger than their fear. Their readiness for sacrifice lost its power and they realised that there was no enough time to wait in certain situation. At the certain point, according to some interviewees, they organized a protest against the going policy and war. They were aggressive, asking to be heard. This act was considered "as something shameful". Women were called to be aware of the difficult situation and to be patient. But, for the first time during the war in Lašva valley, they did not want to listen. They wanted to show that they existed and that nobody could manipulate their lives. They forgot limitations and refused to be considered just as crying faces and depressive subjects. They were educated by the traditional and patriarchal way to be patient, to talk not too loudly, but that day they – as they narrated – surprised themselves and decided to take a different path.⁵² One of them, a widow (21 years old) with one little son, narrated through tears: "Friends told me not to cry. Accept the situation like it was. The pain will stay, but if you overcome that soon, a "normal" life will come again. But nobody explained how can I manage that. I am not a machine, if they are my real friends they should understand my pain and could not expect me to stop thinking, to forget." Women tried to be prepared for the worst even though none could predict such tragedies. One twelve year old girl narrated: "The last months I slept dressed, especially after the massacre in Križančevo selo on December 12, 1993. That night I did the same. In the morning about 5.00 o'clock, strong explosions and shooting woke me up. It was chaos. It seemed that hell opened its door. I heard loud voices from outside: 'Ustaše, Ustaše! Ready for home!' I saw one mother run away from the house carrying her son. I followed her. One soldier stayed in front of the house, turned his rifle to her and shot from 1-2 meters. I saw her fall down. I screamed, took the child and started to run. The same soldiers shot at me and the little boy from the 4-5 meters away. Suddenly, I felt a pain in my arm, but I succeeded to escape. I met some ABiH soldiers. They wanted to kill me, but one of them saw that I was wounded and they left me... I saw when one muslim soldier shot rifle at Ankica Grabovac, 20 year old, from Buhine Kuće. The Muslims soldiers threw a bomb into a house of one woman. She ran out screaming, asking for help. There were more killings in the village, but I was so scared that I could not see them" (CPD, 1997).

2.3. *Women – Observers of the War*

Women were not on the front line, but they were on the line of everyday life that was full of traps. They were, as they said, listening to the sounds of battle. "It was not so easy to

⁵¹ Table 1. Interviewee No. 12.

⁵² It was a period when ABiH massacred soldiers and civilians from Križančevo selo and when Croatian authorities negotiated with them about an exchange of the corps, but without any results. The women stopped to cry and pray and came to fight for the dead, showing that were brave enough to face the truth. After many days of negotiation between two warring sides by mediating of ECMM, Red Cross and UNPROFOR, ABiH finally accepted to exchange them, but their massacred bodies. "The Muslim army killed in Križančevo selo 74 Croats on December 22, 1993." It has been told to commander of British Battalion of UNPROFOR, col. Williams, in the 3. Corpus of ABiH. See documentation of Centre for Collection Documentation (CDD/CPD), Sarajevo, 1997.

stay at home, in a "safety place" knowing that your son was there and could be shot each moment. The only consolation in these difficult moments was a faith in God. I prayed, God, let my children stay alive. I do not care for myself. I am old enough and he is so young." Many of them confirmed that their faith saved them from insanity. They also were transmitters of religious feelings to their children, as well as national identity. They got it from their mothers. "Mother instilled religious feelings in me and I found this attractive. I thought about some sort of silence, a prayer directed to God." One of them said: "When my son had to go to the frontline, I would always tell him not to shoot anybody who works in the fields or who is passing through. If he had to shoot to save himself, it was his military duty. I prayed Holy Mother if she wanted to take him of me, let him be in one piece, let him be killed from bullets. I could not stand to see him massacred or killed by mines. I could bury him nicely⁵³ and I could understand it with God and his help. If he gave me such a destiny, it had to be like that. I was not the only mother who prayed like that. These were sorrowful thoughts during the war."⁵⁴

Religious moments are present in all stories. Catholics from Central Bosnia are well-known as strong believers. The observation of Serbian anthropologist Cvijić confirms this. Catholics in Posavina, Cvijić compared them to those from Lašva valley. He wrote: "These Catholics from Posavina are very similar with one small group of Catholics whose roots are in Dalmatia. They were settled in Bosnia in the nineteenth century. They have the same customs as Dinarians... This is the soundest Catholic's population; their houses are full of children. This group gave educated people and merchants of indisputable value, especially those who are from the big village Dolac near Travnik" (Cvijić, 1987:76). The Croatian religious feelings were promoted and supported by local Franciscans; they initiated many humanitarian activities during the war. They faced war in their everyday duties to bury the dead during the night, because almost all of the graveyards were on the top of hills or in a visible place.⁵⁵ It was not allowed to be there during the funeral. "They allowed you just to see him for a while, and you have to live with this memory forever. I could not even accept this fact, because everything happened suddenly, death and funeral. When they first brought the corpse, they were in plastic bags."⁵⁶ Days went by and tragedies became everyday events. "You have not even accepted one tragedy but another one was at the door," noticed one woman who lost a younger brother. Another said: "After the war I went to the church, to confess as I always did. The war left many bad feelings deep within me and I thought this would help me to feel better, to clean my soul in some way. I told the priest that I probably was not a good believer sometimes when I felt hatred. It was not hatred focused on someone, no, no. Who could I hate? I do not know. I hated simply this time which brought these killing of human beings. It was a madhouse, really!"⁵⁷

⁵³ It is irony of life, how could a funeral be nice, but this mother knew that it could be even worse. Many mothers never found out about their children or they got just pieces of their body.

⁵⁴ See Table. Interviewee No. 12.

⁵⁵ Two Franciscans in Fojnica were killed during this war. The guardian of Franciscan Monastery in Fojnica, Franciscan Nikica Miličević and Franciscan Leon Migić.

⁵⁶ See Table. Interviewee No. 16. In her memory about her dead husband is always present this plastic bag as something awful and unexpected.

⁵⁷ See Table. Interviewee No. 12. This woman went regularly to the church on Sunday in spite of the shelling. Once one shell fell very close of the place where she and her daughter were, going to a graveyard to light a candle. The daughter suggested them return, but she said, "No, we are going where we intended." Her mother commented that she is like a pig, always going on a different side, and that she is not like other women! She was just laughing. I noticed that she is full of some strength and she is not afraid of life or death. Interview with her was very interesting and enlightening.

2.4. Facing the Future

Women are very realistic in talking about their future life even though they do not know how to deal with the political solutions and establishment of the State. They considered these actions as useless acts, stressing that the same people decided about the war, and now the same people are here as peacekeepers. One of them commented: "Our country was like one house. Everybody took everything from it and nobody worked, but everybody dragged it down. All of us worked like this and because of this, all fell down. When nothing left to steal, we fought each other, and pushed out one another. I stole from you, you stole from me; I killed your cow, you mine and we destroyed all what we had. Then, we stayed in poverty, the world do not look at us. And now, we are hating each other. Large intolerance is between peoples, as I could see and feel it. Tito was a good and powerful president when he managed "to tame" all these non-workers. I would like to honour him.⁵⁸ She also added: "Might be in the future that these politicians succeed to realise that those who come to someone land has to respect the one who was there before. Years and years will pass until then. We shall see and experience lot of bad things, we will live to see nothing good. There is hope, but not for us." But, she does not complain. She said this with such a calm in her voice, that one who listened to her should think that she probably knows something more than others. But she just explained this with her life experience and a belief in God. "I do not know what will be in a future. People are paralysed with the feeling of unsafety and loss. They are leaving Lašva valley, no matter where. People are simply a lost flock without a shepard. Who knows what tomorrow would bring?" (See Table. Interviewee).

Nationalism put on stage woman-mother, the symbol of the nation, of national suffering, from one side, and woman as a sex object and as property of the national collective, on the other side. The woman-mother has a task "to homogenise the nation into experiencing its own sense of danger or superiority" (Milić, 1993:115) that should be used against the enemy. In all three republics during and after the war, raped women were presented as victims, not as women, or human beings, but members of the special nation. That is how nationalists used women and their miserable position. Those incidents had an effect on all sides as a reason for retaliation and defence of their proud nations. Thus, women were treated "as passive objects, as victims of the legal instrumentalisation and media manipulation" (Milić, 1993:116). The actual ruling nationalist political orders in the Balkans want women out of political activity, and they almost succeeded. But that success does not mean that women are ready to accept such a position. They are fighting for their rights, becoming politically active to protect their position. Women have to see their rights as a reality to prevent "the manipulation of women's bodies" (Milić, 1993:120). If they remain passive, democracy will be lost for them, what it is a tendency in these new "democratic" states. The emergence and persistence of women activism should be a continuation of a search for new solutions and approaches. According to our interviewees, women realise that the task of changing social attitudes is a long process, but it should be attacked from all sides in order to achieve results and a better position of women in society. "For the Myth of the War Experience, in the final analysis, is tied to the cult of the nation: if this is an abeyance, as it was after the World War II in Western and Central Europe, the myth is fatally weakened, but if nationalisation as a civic religion is once more in the ascendant the myth will, once again, accompany it" (Mosse, 1990:224).

⁵⁸ Table 1. Interviewee No. 12. When Tito was alive, he created one state with a false stability based on foreign credits. After his death, his successors were not able to stand a situation that appeared and the country collapsed. The results are well-known.

Conclusion

These interviews gathered around the framework of real events in Lašva valley during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate the marks of actual and constructed events which were locked in women's mind and painful memories. It could be argued that women as "survivors" in the society collected the pieces of their lives in the lost battlefield of civilisation. They were able to carry men's war consequences and to give birth to children which future is not clear in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to the women interviewed, the most interesting instance from the period of the Second World War was the fact that real war and tragic times for the Croats in the valley started when the partisans came and occupied this region. The partisans proclaimed themselves as a force which supposed to clean up a new state from any opposite opinion. Thus, through this analysing of Lašva valley, it could be argued that people considered post-war period as a continuation of wartime. New state ideology made of them "second order citizens", just because "they were "Croats." After 1945, their yesterday friends and neighbours were suspicious towards Croats, while during the war nobody knew how to behave or to which side give the primacy. "Each army was the same." As one woman clearly stated about the Second World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina: "I was not for national parties and their policy, but I should follow my people, even though I did not always agree with the goals of the leaders."

Older women picturesquely remembered the events from the Second World War. Within their testimonies, women divided individual and collective experiences presenting everyday life as a place under the influences of different ideologies. Their memories were constructed in war time and stamped by it. After the war, they remember, they were not allowed to remember or to talk about missing people, the members of their family. This had to be ignored and forgotten. They found an escape from forced oblivion, creating songs and secret stories which were transferred within one family through the generations. Croatian families, women would argue, were stamped as the Ustaša's family and as the opponents of Yugoslavia. Due to that, they had to suffer for disagreement with a new regime. As interviewees often stated, Lašva valley was in their opinion, a region where many tragic events happened after the war and where the new government put their activists in any important municipal working place, and also brought teachers from the Serbia and Montenegro to teach local children. Their aim, they argue, was to suppress the Croatian national consciousness in the people and to force them to accept a new mutual Yugoslav nationality that was found.

Interviewed women often referred to the term Ustaša which labelled, according to them, the Croats from Lašva valley in the recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women referred to this label, without analysing its determination. Such a bizarre invocation of the old terms to identify someone's position in the actual conflict made profound gap between the people, confusing them in the same time. The past influenced tragic events of these times and women were forced to face the ghost from the past, which should be, they think, forgotten and buried for ever. There is a question though how a multiethnic society can achieve remembrance under the conditions of peculiarly distinct individual memories. The Second World War, it seems, provoked much more problems in the collective memory after 1945; the sense of identity and belonging to different nations, religions and social discourse, as well as their mutual relations intensified and has taken the central place of people's life and interests recently. According to interviews, the Second World War was not so violent like recent one. Probably, it was not open demonstration of violence, which occurred in the early post-war time. People were missing, taking away and their families never heard about them any more. Painful women's memories from the after war period are telling us a lot about the hidden violence and forbidden thoughts and speech during the Communist reign. Women were not allowed to talk about their tragedies and had not chance to defend their own existence and social rights. They had to accept new government or to leave.

In the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croats of Lašva valley were not willing to leave Lašva valley and their homes and they stayed. The worst notion in the recent war for both generations of women and men was the fact that they were attacked by their neighbours to whom they believed and the sense of betrayed was painful. They refused to believe in that till the time they became victims. Therefore, it is obvious in the interviews that there is a wish for "revenge". It could be said that due to this the war got today's results. Through their testimonies, the interviewees, seemed to argue that they are not ready to live again in the same mixture of nations, especially after tragic experiences. The women seemed to be those who refused to stay in such a country full of contradiction and nonunderstanding. Talking about future, they showed readiness to forget, but not to live again together, especially women who have children. They would state that, on the basis of historical experiences in the Valley, they would not want the same horrible experience for their children. They wanted to provide and protect their future. The perceptive characteristics of women's testimonies offered a new picture of the life in changed living situation. A hope for order in chaos has somewhere given to those identities an exceptionally bright and idealistic form.

Creating order out of chaos in post-war Bosnia, though, seems to be male dominated area. There is, according to interviewees, a considerable blockage of women's participation in peace-making process. Almost no women were included in any sphere of decision making projects during this war. They were excluded from the all levels of peacekeeping activities or any other activity according the war. "Within the governmental structure of the warring countries, women are either non-existent or, at best, comprise a very small percentage of those in power. The last four years have witnessed only one exception to this complete absence of women in negotiating position. The decision-making process concerning war and peace, cease-fires, territories and borders is evidently 'not' a women's issue" (Belić, 1995:32). Ending of this suffering is still not in women hands and, by all means, belong only to the future. "Suffering has no ethnic boundaries... All groups of civilians in this war, to different degrees and at different times, have been used by their own leaders, attacked by the enemy, and pushed out of their communities" (Mertus, 1993:16).

Table 1. Basic Information about Interviewed Women

NUMBER of interviewee	AGE in 1992	MARITAL STATUS (single, married, divorced, widows)	NUMBER OF CHILDREN alive	EDUCATION	PROFESSION
1.	78	married	7	-	housewife
2.	76	divorced	5	-	housewife
3.	73	married	6	-	housewife
4.	71	widow	3	-	housewife
5.	70	married	6	two classes	housewife
6.	70	widow	4	two classes	housewife
7.	69	widow	8	-	housewife
8.	69	married	5	four classes	housewife
9.	60	divorced	2	two classes	housewife
10.	57	married	2	four classes	housewife
11.	54	married	2	secondary school	teacher
12.	48	married	3	secondary school	works in personal office

13.	44	married	2	secondary school	book-keeper
14.	37	widow	1	secondary school	book-keeper
15.	30	married	1	secondary school	economic technician
16.	30	widow	3	secondary school	secretary
17.	33	single	–	Technological faculty	engineer
18.	28	single	–	Mechanical bachelor	informatic technician
19.	24	widow	1	secondary school	secretary
20.	24	single	–	Economic faculty	student
21.	38	widow	3	Secondary school	trader

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PODIJELJENO REPREZENTIRANJE II SVJETSKOG RATA (1941-1945) I RAT U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI (1992-1995): ŽENE U LAŠVANSKOJ DOLINI U BOSNI

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Ovaj rad nastoji prikazati Lašvansku dolinu, područje u Bosni i Hercegovini s većinskim hrvatskim stanovništvom, za vrijeme II svjetskog rata, te rata u Bosni i Hercegovini. Lašvanska dolina je predstavljena kroz pripovijedanje i videna očima žena koje su bile žrtve i svjedoci II svjetskog rata i/ili rata u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1992-1995. Izbjegavajući viktimizaciju i romantizaciju, ovaj tekst ima za cilj ispitati unutrašnja preživljavanja i iskustva dviju generacija hrvatskih žena Lašvanske doline. Ratna sjećanja stanovnika, Hrvata Lašvanske doline predočena su kronološki kroz njihovo osobno kazivanje. Bitno je naglasiti da su autora interesirale psihološke traume, tako da su druge dimenzije života zapostavljene, te stoga ostavljene za neka buduća istraživanja.