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HELPERS ACROSS THE ETHNIC DIVIDE: THE ROLE OF *KOMŠILUK* IN RESCUING DURING THE BOSNIAN CONFLICT

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to understand the specificities of the acts of rescuing during the Bosnian conflict by answering questions related to the identities and motivation of the people who have carried out such acts. The article examines to what extent individuals feel ethnically detached when conducting the acts of help, and to what extent they do not. I will present through an interpretative framework that *direct relations, extended contact through the neighborliness lines (komšiluk), and socialization with members of other ethnicities* before the war were the key factors in helping acts. This enabled helpers to perceive ethnicity as a silent category and assisted them in undergoing an identity shift from the ethnic to local and communal identification. The article seeks to reformulate the concept of rescuers and adjust it to other social, historical and cultural settings.

Key words: helpers, *komšiluk*, friendship, rescuing, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Apstrakt: Cilj članka je shvatiti specifičnosti spasilaca tokom rata u Bosni i Hercegovini kroz odgovor na pitanja motivacije identiteta ljudi koji su izvršili djela spašavanja. Članak ispituje u kojoj se mjeri spasioci osjećaju *etnički odvojeno dok djeluju kao spasioci*, a u kojoj mjeri ne. Kroz interpretativni članak ukazuje da su *direktni odnosi, prošireni kontakti kroz susjedstvo (komšiluk) i socijalizacija s pripadnicima drugih nacionalnosti prije rata* bili ključni faktori za pojedinca da se priključe djelima pomaganja. Ovi faktori su pomogli spasiocima da etničku identifikaciju posmatraju kao tihu kategoriju, mijenjajući etničku pripadnost u pripadnost lokalnoj zajednici. Članak nastoji preoblikovati koncept spasilaca i prilagoditi ga drugim društvenim, povijesnim i kulturnim uvjetima.

Ključne riječi: spasioci, komšiluk, prijateljstvo, spašavanje, Bosna i Hercegovina

Actions and motivations of the rescuers during wartime have been largely examined within the literature of Holocaust studies. The Israeli Parliament in 1953 enacted the Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Act establishing Yad Vashem as an official site of memory to honor the rescuers as the “Righteous among the Nations.” Yad Vashem officially defined rescuers as the *Non-Jewish who risk their life, freedom and safety in order to rescue several Jews from threat of death without exacting monetary compensation.*²⁰² Initially the concept of the rescuer was applied only to the Holocaust, and insufficiently in the other genocidal contexts such as Bosnia or Rwanda genocide. Thus, inspired by this existing Holocaust literature on rescuers and their motivations, the aim of this article is to investigate this topic in a Bosnian conflict (1992-1995).

The aim is to understand the specificities of the acts of rescuing during the Bosnian conflict, which is usually portrayed as ethnic, by answering questions related to the identity and motivation of the people who have carried out such acts. Presented article argue that helpers during the conflict stayed indifferent toward imposed and politicized ethnicity that served as a tool for ethno-national mobilization. They were able to perceive ethnicity as a silent factor and remain detached from ethnically driven conflict. This enables them to conduct the acts of help. Additionally, I question what encouraged helpers to stay detached from imposed ethnic mobilization and to conduct the acts of help. I am suggesting the expansion of the notion of a rescuer in order to consider conflicts that took place after the Holocaust and in other contexts. The specificity of one society, conflict, or genocide will produce different perceptions about those who undertake the acts of help. The help for those in danger has come in different forms such as direct assistance, warnings of the upcoming danger, or providing shelter and protection. These acts did not necessarily endanger the lives of rescuers, as the Yad Vashem definition requires; nevertheless, those acts did save lives. Therefore, I seek to reformulate the concept of the rescuers in Holocaust; I operate with the concept of the helpers, as the title of the article indicates.

Thirty years after the Yugoslav dissolution and the wars in the region, much has been articulated about different reasons for the conflict, its causes and

²⁰² Righteous Among the Nation: <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>

consequences, along with explanations of the violence itself. Growing up in a post-conflict society, and in two cities largely affected by the war (Srebrenica and Bratunac), I was trying to understand the level of inhumanity and crimes committed in this area. I would walk through the streets in Srebrenica and Bratunac constantly thinking whether person I am encountering now, or another man sitting in the cafe, whether they have killed someone during the war. Being active in both cities in different capacities, I often come across narratives of helping and rescuing during the war. It strikes to me that those acts are not recorded, nor explored enough. I had difficulty formally documenting oral testimonies, mainly because my encounters considered it is not valuable sharing these stories, instead it can be dangerous, but also neither it was recognized by the state as noble thing to do.

Therefore, I wanted to give my contribution to the field by recording the oral testimonies of those who conducted acts of help and answer the question what the motivation behind the helping deeds was. My interest was to explore to what was the role of ethnicity in helping acts during the war. The article shades the light on different side of the war and will elaborate through theoretical and empirical chapters on how *direct relations, extended contact through the neighborliness lines, and socialization with members of other ethnicities before the war* enabled helpers to perceive ethnicity as a silent category and assisted them in undergoing an identity shift from the ethnic to the local and communal identification.

Theory of the rescuer's motivation

Within the literature related to the Holocaust and rescuers, concerns are directed toward understanding why one acts and one does not, and how one becomes a rescuer whereas another remains a bystander. An overview of several variables such as gender, religion, and social status provides the background information about who the rescuers were, but these variables alone cannot explain why those individuals in certain context and society committed acts of help. Thus, authors turn to the sociological and psychological examination of the rescuer phenomenon in order to create comprehensive overview. In that way, Oliner and Oliner classify the acts of rescue as instances of altruistic behavior, others such as Eva Fogelman and Kristen Renwick Monroe emphasize self-integrity, individuality, and the way rescuers see the other. A

few authors, primarily Oliner and Oliner, and to some extent Ervin Staub, explore the personal connections between the rescuers and those they rescued in some parts of their work.

Rescuers' behavior is complex and incorporates the difficulty of moral decision, incompatible responsibilities, making choices, and living with the consequences of one's actions. It could be very uncertain to approach the rescuers' stories with judgment between good and evil, black and white, as the numerous factors can affect one's capability to act or not to act. Those could be in the realm of motivation, human ability and human limitations.²⁰³ The research question of the paper tries to explore what the key factors within the motivation of helpers during the Bosnian conflict were, and how the in-group/out-group self-identity was perceived. Thus, it is significant to mention contributions of different authors who try to answer this question.

The largest conducted study by Oliner and Oliner contains interviews with almost 700 Holocaust rescuers and non-rescuers and their findings reveal that the rescuers had extensive worldviews seeing all individuals as a part of a common humanity, based on human connectedness.²⁰⁴ What would be later important for analyzing the Bosnian context is that such individuals tended to be skeptical of nationalism or any ethno-nationalisms because they viewed it as exclusionary. In order to develop what Oliner and Oliner identify as the "altruistic behavior," family played a significant role in the construction of an altruistic personality.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, most of the rescuers felt that what they did was a private matter.²⁰⁶ Due to the complexity of their behavior and difficulty of moral decisions, the definition of rescuers in the literature tend to use terminology such as ordinary heroes, or just heroes, or extraordinary persons, even though they did not see themselves as such.

Prominent author, Kristen R. Monroe in her book *The Hand of Compassion: Portraits of Moral Choice during the Holocaust* maintains that those who conducted rescuing acts are distinguished less by a particular moral sense and more by an identity that offered them a choice to act, which does not necessarily have the connection to altruism or morality. Furthermore, in

²⁰³ Flescher, M. 2003. 34.

²⁰⁴ P. Oliner Samuel and M. Oliner Perl. 1988. 23-24.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Fogelman E.1994. 300;

her study “*Cracking the Code of Genocide: The Moral Psychology of Rescuers, Bystanders, and Nazis during the Holocaust*,” Monroe tries to understand *why and how identity influences one to act and one not to*. She asks three significant questions in order to comprehend the rescuers and bystanders’ positions: (1) what causes ordinary people to become genocide aires? (2) How do bystanders differ from rescuers and from supporters and perpetrators of genocide? (3) What causes some people to risk their lives and those of their families to save strangers?²⁰⁷ She finds that a sense of personal identity developed during the life was one of the underlying factors which compelled rescuers to undertake acts of help. Yet, she was not sure what kind of identity rescuers acquire. Also, how did this identity trigger the rescuers’ choice to act? She partly finds the answer in the idea that we learn who we are because our identity is always in relation to the others. The idea of “the other” is the most basic structure of distinct identity.²⁰⁸ What Monroe emphasizes here is that the rescuers’ acts are always in connection to the other and are not purely driven from personal trade-offs or personal characteristics. Thus, if we want to examine the rescuers, understanding of rescuers should be approached from the position of the rescuer and those who are rescued, as the paper would examine later within empirical findings. If we would apply Monroe’s examination to Bosnian context, self-identity in relation to the other with an emphasis on specific ethnicity would be one of the key considerations that contributes to the understanding of the importance of locality, community and proximity in shaping one’s identity and choice to act.

In trying to comprehend how identity influences the choice to act, Monroe focuses on the self-image being crucial for the rescuers’ decision to act in comparing to the Nazi supporters that reveal quite different self-concepts.²⁰⁹ The other illuminating and important aspect for understanding of the Bosnian context and rescuing behavior is what Monroe emphasizes as in-group and out-group categorization in connection to the identity and belonging. This classification is significant also for understanding the bystanders’ and the perpetrators’ positions.²¹⁰ Yet, her research concludes that the key characteristic of the rescuer’s category is that they see *similarity between humans*, while

²⁰⁷ Monroe K. 2008.700.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.214;

²⁰⁹ Monroe, K. 2004. 703;

²¹⁰ Monroe, K. 2004. 703.

perpetrator's focus is on differences.²¹¹ Seeing similarities between groups would avoid mistreatment of individuals based on the group belonging, because classifying people as different makes it easier to justify their abuse. Due to the imposed differences across the ethnic lines during and before the conflict in Bosnia, her research is crucial in understanding the helpers, and it contributes to the understanding whether and how helpers acquire the idea of similarities across differences and what was the driving force behind.

As we saw, the idea that identity played a crucial role in shaping the treatment of others comes from the understanding that the rescuers' behavior is always connected to the way they see themselves in relation to others. According to Monroe, this was the reason why the rescuers are left with no other choice than to help Jews.²¹² But for Eva Fogelman, the reason why rescuers act is because they share humanistic values and thus they have strong self-integrity and self-identity.²¹³ According to this author, rescuers are undergoing a transformative process in order to acquire the idea of the rescuer self.²¹⁴ Once they acquire strong self-integrity and strong identity, they will exhibit what Oliner and Oliner describe as *togetherness with humanity*.²¹⁵ However, as seen from the literature examining the rescuer's behavior, for them what they did was the normal thing to do and they would avoid portraying acts of help as extraordinary behaviors.

As Fogelman, Oliner and Oliner, and many other authors exploring the rescuers' behavior, Kristen considers that all rescuers exhibit a similar worldview; all people are valued equally where human well-being should be the foundation of every identity system.²¹⁶ As such, it will be significant to examine whether it is possible to have one worldview when the differences among ethnic groups are constantly emphasized throughout the conflict, as it was the case during and even before the Bosnian conflict. Also, if identity is the key factor in one's motivation to take a choice, the article examines what kind of identity and what the specificities of that identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina are.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Fogelman E. 1994. 253.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ P. Oliner Samuel and M. Oliner Perl. 1998. 6.

²¹⁶ Kristina E. Thalhammer, Paula L. and others. 2007. 217.

Adding to the understanding of the one worldview, *Courageous Resisters – The Power of Ordinary People* highlights that an important precondition for resisting is a particular *all-embracing worldview* because he/she would see all population as a part of their in-group, or as the view – “*people like me.*”²¹⁷ This in-group and out-group relations are particularly important in order to understand and position the helpers in Bosnian context. The first step to becoming a resister is to identify and become aware of injustices in the society, similarly as Ervin Staub explores in his writings.²¹⁸ People aware of injustice will find themselves at the crossroads, which is the key moment for deciding whether to act or not. Most of the authors I consulted so far try to answer these questions: when, in which moment and how one decides to act. At the crossroads, potential resister would decide whether to take responsibility for injustice or to slide down on the side of the perpetrators and bystanders. Furthermore, the authors have noticed a very blurred line between acting against injustice and joining the perpetrators’ side.

The responses one finds at the crossroads spring from the interaction of preconditions (who the person is and what he has done before), networks (who the person knows and if he or she is in a reciprocal relationship) and the context in which resisters find themselves.²¹⁹ When these factors are combined, then individuals tend to make choices at the crossroads. Furthermore, if factors such as attitude toward authority, pro-social values and relationships with others converge, then the act of resistance will happen.²²⁰ In the end, authors would agree that there is not one essential precondition that predicts courageous behavior; however *there is a constellation of known factors that encourage it.*²²¹ To sum up above ideas from different authors, it is very difficult to understand the rescuers’ behavior, what influences their behavior, encourages it, or what the trigger for the single helping action is.

Several authors would undertake the position that we cannot understand the rescuers without examining the perpetrators and bystanders’ position. But when it comes to the rescuers, Ervin Staub discovered that the rescuers

²¹⁷ Kristina E. Thalhammer, Paula L. and others. 2007. 16.

²¹⁸ Ervin, S. 2003. 153

²¹⁹ Ibid. 154 and 155.

²²⁰ Ibid. from 21 to 27 and 152.

²²¹ Ibid. 150; See also the page: 151.

*identified themselves with the victims of injustice.*²²² Staub, just like Monroe, points at the crucial role of sameness among people in deciding to act.

Additionally, authors are highlighting that the key factor for the rescuers is the knowledge about the victim and compassion for the victim's plight. One of the interesting clarifications offered here is that being part of a group helps fulfill needs for security, identity, connection, and effectiveness, while much like Monroe, Staub sees inequality between groups as a basis of violence.²²³ Those questions and triggers for the models of behavior presented above are the concepts I examine within the analysis in order to understand what the motivation and personal trade-offs of the rescuers in Bosnia are.

Based on the readings presented above, we know that rescuers and their acts could be understood through identity, humanity and personal integrity perspective, but the question whether and how the idea of community or proximity can influence the rescuers' deeds is still open. In the following sections, I will introduce some of the scholarly work exploring the proximity of life through what is known as *komšiluk*. Having looked at how the topic of rescuers is generally approached in literature through an emphasis on identity, sameness, equality, togetherness, the next chapter will contribute to the understanding how the proximity of habitation in Bosnia inevitably leads to the reconceptualization of the rescuers concept and brings the necessity to rephrase the idea of the rescuers to accommodate other contexts as well.

The role of neighborliness (*komšiluk*) in rescuer acts in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This sub-chapter seeks to shed light on a different side of *komšiluk* by exposing the recorded stories of cordial relations, helping and the importance of *komšiluk* relations during the war. Based on fieldwork in Podrinje region, I identify the stories of good neighborliness during the war and locate its importance. In this way, I try to challenge the predominant understanding in the academic literature of neighborliness being ultimately aggressive and

²²² Ervin, S. 2003. 29. Also, Eva Fogelman take the same position by arguing that the transformation from a bystander to a rescuer requires awareness of the victim's plight, and willingness to see what others choose not to see, to pursue the truth no matter where it leads.

²²³ Ervin, S. 2003. 14.

hostile. I also question that the idea that *komšiluk* behavior, norms and close intimate relations were the principal foundation of the violence that occurred, adding a new dimension of understanding *komšiluk* by acknowledging acts of help, courage and kindness between neighbors during the conflict.

When Yugoslav republics started to politicize ethnicity and to foster political divisions, locality played a crucial role in maintaining tolerance and mutual understanding between ethnicities. One of the specific elements of Bosnian locality or countryside is the idea of neighborliness, or *komšiluk*. The word *komšiluk* is a derivative from Turkish *komşija* (neighbor); it translates to neighborhood and refers both to neighborly relations and to the spatial environment of the neighborhood whose boundaries are defined subjectively. The community or the neighborhood usually relies on promotion of non-kin, neighborhood ties and bonds as forms of moral community and mutual support.²²⁴ For Xavier Bougarel, *komšiluk* is a term used to describe “good neighborly relations among members of different ethnic groups”.²²⁵ As I observed many times in the society where I grew up, living together (*zajedno*) is a matter of eating together, and living in proximity (in *komšiluk*) is a matter of mutuality between next-door neighbors. “Villagers in Bosnia also associate the idea of neighborhood with memories of mutual help during the hay season in the fields, where people regularly help each other because, in their interpretation, that is what constitutes “the real *komšiluk*.” As David Henig described it, “*komšiluk* is the space where people live with one another, rather than next to each other”.²²⁶

In rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the household is central to the imagination of belonging. Household is the place where inter-ethnic interactions take place through mutual visits and gossiping over coffee as a matter of daily routine.²²⁷ Sorabji posits that neighborhood refers primarily to the physical neighborhood and its social relations regardless of neighborhood ethno-national identities, and points out that it is “ethnic coding bias and ethnic categorizations employed by scholars that would suggest differently”.²²⁸

²²⁴ Cornelia, S. 2008. 100-101.

²²⁵ Xavier, B. 2013. 574.

²²⁶ David, H. 2012. 10-15.

²²⁷ Elissa H. 2010. 57.

²²⁸ Cornelia, S. 2008. 107.

This work presents exactly this idea of ethnic indifferences within *komšilik* as opposed to the ethnic categorization and groupism approach in academia.²²⁹ Thus, neighborliness as microcosms served as a platform for the negotiation of the ethnicity.

In addition, in Bosnia, the house provides villagers with rich symbolism and expressions that are used in everyday language; for example, 'opened' and 'closed' doors of the house are a central metaphor for the openness and closeness of the people.²³⁰ As it was described by Paula Pickering, while following particular families and individuals for eight years and trying to understand the dynamic social processes within which people understood and located themselves, she found that female villagers often engaged in extended coffee visiting, where open door were a practice. The interaction that happened allowed for the expression of both differences (religious affiliation) and commonalities (co-villagers and hospitality).²³¹ In the same manner, Elissa Helms describes the importance of coffee culture within the neighborhood for the reconciliation processes.²³² Coffee culture between the neighborhoods in different part of Bosnia was traditional also during the war. In her book, *Sarajevo under the siege: Anthropology of the wartime*, Ivana Macek also noticed that *komšilik* during the war was a way of resisting dominant ethno-nationalistic discourse because *komšilik* as an institution effectively denied the primacy of ethnic bounds; people crossed ethnic boundaries seeking security in *komšilik* rather than within ethno-nationalist groups.²³³

Tone Bringa in her article *Nationality categories, national identification and identity formation in multinational Bosnia* uses the same approach to explore the ordinary daily life of villagers in the small inter-ethnically mixed village of Dolina. She concludes that the presence of other ethnic groups was needed in order to construct cultural identity, since it is mainly through its presence that a person is taught awareness of his or her own ethnic identity while, differences in

²²⁹ For more on groupism and ethnic categorization see Roger Brubaker: *Ethnicity without Groups*, University of California, and Cambridge Journals. 2010.

²³⁰ David, H. 2012. 10.

²³¹ Paula, P. 2007. 19.

²³² Elisa, H. 2010.17-23.

²³³ Ivana, M. 2009. 111.

dress and house style are only a reflection of everyday life attitude.²³⁴ According to her, the neighborliness represents “the acknowledgement of the fluidity of collective identities which makes it necessary to invoke an ‘ethnic boundary’ through frequent statements of ‘what our customs are and are not.’²³⁵ In that way, internalization of ethnic differences through the neighborhood was constantly present. Thus, neighborliness served as a ground for ethnic crossing and negotiation of differences. Nurtured friendships across neighborhood lines were strongly related to growing up together and being constantly directed to each other. The sense of closeness and intimate knowledge about each other will have tremendous impact on people to conduct the acts of help during the wartime.

The rationale behind the neighborhood approach is that individuals generally spend a lot of time in that environment, so that trusting attitudes are thought to be most affected by this immediate social context and less so by larger regional or even national contexts.²³⁶ The microcosms of neighborliness were thus numerous times able to transcend the fear and ethnic mobilization employed by the state apparatus and maintain *komšiluk* traditional norms of mutual respect and coexistence. Additionally, the study on neighborhood diversity and social trust shows that both strong ties, such as intimate interethnic friendships, as well as weaker ties through intercultural home visits have the ability to contribute to the helping behavior.²³⁷ The study on “*Close relationships and inclusion of the other in the self*” demonstrates that within the intimate relations, which is a synonym for closeness, the other is treated as a self, or as it was noted, there is the tendency of “including the others in the self”²³⁸

Based on the literature on *komšiluk* and helping across the neighborliness lines presented above, it could be noted that those that were able to integrate the idea of the self in the other and to maintain and cultivate friendships across the neighborhood microcosms, were able to maintain *Gemeinschaft* in a trans-ethnic way and thus commit acts of help. I emphasize that *komšiluk* was a particular field for nurturing different acts of help before the war. As

²³⁴ Tone R. Bringa. 81.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Birte G. and Markus F. 2014. 1236.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Arthur A., Elaine N. and others. 1991. 242.

we saw from the abovementioned authors, helping behavior during the war existed across the neighborliness lines. On the other hand, different kind of friendships existed not only across neighborliness lines, but also in different kind of proximities.

Friendship – raja and papci

It is interesting to note that there is hierarchy in understanding what it means to be a real friend and part of “*raja*” and one who is outsider of your comradeship, not sharing the same values – *papak*.²³⁹ This dualism fits more the spirit and dialect of Sarajevo, but it is widely used in other local communities across Bosnia. Macek explains that pre-war friendship was deep and strong, almost equal to the bonds of kinship and imagined as “blood relations”.²⁴⁰ Close friendships would usually end up in different kinds of godfather’s relations. As I explained, they would become *raja*. In Bosnia, friends would develop special kind of godparenthood such as haircut parenthood (*sisano kumstvo*), new-born parenthood and bride and bridegroom.²⁴¹ A godparent would make sure, if something happened to the parents of the child that he would provide security for that child. In addition, haircut parenthood was a way of crossing religious and ethnic boundaries through the friendship. Hair cut godparenthood is an alternative to baptism parenthood since, in order to be a haircut godparent, it is not required to be of the same religion.²⁴² Thus, when the child is born, the godparent cuts the child’s first hair, which at the end symbolizes the close intimate friendship. The biggest number of parenthoods happened between different ethnic groups, as a sign of honor and friendship, but also as a sign of ethnic boundary crossing.

Strong bounds between friends were specific relationship before the war but also during the war. In their book *Toward Carrying Society*, Oliner and Oliner, define bonds further: *They refer to the attachments people make to places or people; those locales, individuals or groups with which they feel intensely*

²³⁹ *Papak* is a slang used to denote the uncultivated citizens. *Papak* means the feet of the pig, which is in a way used to metaphorically explain that someone has dirty thoughts or dirty behavior. Overall, *papak* is someone who does not respect *raja* and *raja* values.

²⁴⁰ Ivana, M. 2009. 113.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp.114

²⁴² *Ibid.*

*interconnected, related, affiliated and identified. Bonds remain real and ever-present internally even if their sources are externally transformed or removed.*²⁴³ The bonds, as described above, are expressed in growing up together and having a constant connection to each other through life. With people with whom we interrelate daily, it is easier to interact and identify strongly because, as Oliner and Oliner explain, they *have a heightened reality for us.*²⁴⁴ Through the friendship, empathy develops with a tendency to feel for the other person. It is other-oriented rather than self-oriented and it required “entering” into the other.²⁴⁵ Living in the neighborhood and in proximity would emphasize and strengthen friendship relations among different groups. This is only one aspect of friendship development. The other interesting aspect of the understanding friendship across the group relations and consequently individual relations is what Oliner and Oliner call diversification, which means, “*to overcome cultural distortions about groups other than your own for the purpose of seeking the mutual agreement*”.²⁴⁶ Diversification would also imply personal close relations among the individuals in the group. It is the shift from the intergroup relations to the interpersonal relations described as closer and more intimate.²⁴⁷ Individual relations among the helpers and the helped across the ethnic groups were crucial factors in understanding the motivation to act. Being able to go outside of your ethnic boundaries is another equally important factor that I discussed in the previous chapters and upcoming chapters.

Also, it is important to mention that people that lived in proximity – growing up together and being directed toward each other – experience a level of sameness where ethnic identification would come as a second identifier. Sameness can be constructed along different lines such as those that are like me, and those that are not like me, or same/not same.²⁴⁸ We tend to perceive our friends as those like us and to choose friendship with people with whom we see similarity. It is a bounded self that will make distinction of me and not like me in contrast to not me / not like me.²⁴⁹ In order to acquire shared sameness across categories

²⁴³ Perl, M. Oliner and Samuel P.Oliner. 1995. 10.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 44.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 32.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 102.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 106.

²⁴⁸ Franke, W. 2002. 229.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 229.

of different identities, we must be able to see ourselves as interchangeable with one another's circumstances and be able to *ask how it would feel to walk in the other's shoes*.²⁵⁰ In order to be able to see sameness across the categories, and to be able to transcend imposed nationalistic narratives, for helpers in Bosnia friendship was significant driving force.

Methodology

I used oral history interviews as the principal method during the fieldwork. In that capacity I conducted 11 interviews over a period of two weeks, of which eight interviews were with helpers and three were with those who were helped. For the purpose of the paper, it is important to note that oral sources, in this case conducted interviews, "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did".²⁵¹ The aim of the interview is to bring to consciousness ideological problems of the interviewee, to expose the information related to the cultural context in which information was conveyed, and thus to transform an individual story into a cultural narrative; thereby we can understand what happened in the past.²⁵² Therefore, I found the oral history method to be the most suitable observation tool for analysis of episodic events, such as helping processes during the Bosnian conflict.

The process of searching for the helpers and those who were helped was exceedingly difficult. Since I grew up in Srebrenica and afterwards in Bratunac and worked for a period as a journalist. During my work I have encountered many of the stories where neighbors were helping each other during, before and even after the war. However, I had difficult time in getting to my encounters. First, I started to search for people through the local NGOs and my acquaintances. In the end, I resorted to approaching people on the street and asking them if they had any knowledge about the acts of help during the war. Once I explained what I was doing and why I was conducting this research, most of the people were delighted by the topic itself and they would encourage me. But typically, they were not willing to talk. However, several agreed to provide me with information about local people and their acts of

²⁵⁰ Franke, W. 2002. 231.

²⁵¹ Michael, F. 1998. 67.

²⁵² Ibid. 72.

help. I even came across a few helpers themselves. Only few accepted to talk about their deeds as talking about anything related to the war still makes a sensitive situation.

I wanted to see whether the idea of the rescuers, as presented in the literature and previously defined, could be applied on Bosnian helpers. I separated my questions into three sections in order to build comprehensive interviewee profiles. In the first set of questions, I focus on the pre-war period and inter-ethnic relations; the second part, I concentrate on the war period and the acts of rescuing, while the last section of the questions I dedicate to the aftermath of the war. The most important question when it comes to oral history that I also try to trace is what sort of person is speaking and what sort of thing he or she is talking about? What sort of statement is made? What is mentioned and not mentioned during the conversation? Additionally, I try to outline what cultural and historical categories people use in order to retell their experiences. Finally, I analyze what emerged as a theme even though it was not particularly emphasized during the interviews.

Beside the presented important question, within the pre-war section I have asked my interviewees about their age, place of birth, education and other personal information. I was interested in their family life, religion and their relationship with other ethnicities before the war. I felt that my interviewees were open and honest and that they answered every question in detail. Sometimes the situation they found themselves during the interview was emotional since the memory from the war was constantly present in their narration. However, I have a inner sense that all my interviewees had a strong need to answer all of my questions, as they did at the end.

In the set of questions dedicated to the war, I was interested to see how people generally treated each other during the war, and if the person witnessed any killings and deaths before the helping acts. After that, I questioned the helper's motivation, the dangerousness of the situations in which helpers found themselves, and whether there was any kind of personal relations between the helpers and the helped ones. I dedicated the last section to the post-war period and explored the overall picture of helping deeds. At the end, I asked my interviewees whether they talked about his or her acts with family or friends, and whether they are in contact with their rescuer or the person they have

rescued. This question was directed toward comprehending the full picture of helpers and helped ones.

The analysis goes as this: first, I transcribed the interviews in my native language and familiarized myself with the data by doing a first reading of it. Second, I did two more readings of the data and tried to identify any common themes. The next stage involved additional readings of the text, during which I assigned analytical categories to paragraphs by considering the meaning of the text, the context in which it was said, and the idea it expressed. I tried to look for contradictions, points of conflict, inconsistencies, places where dominant explanations run out of explanatory power or reach their explanatory limits. It led me to discover what the major themes that emerge from the data analysis are.

The last stage of the analytical process was arriving at analytical themes. I achieved this by comparing the ideas across different categories, as well as within them. I tried to see what connective threads there are among the participants I interviewed, observing what I understand now that I did not understand before starting the interviews and during the interviewing process. In addition to this, I used field notes to document my observations. Most 57 field notes served as the basis upon which I later wrote my field experiences and analysis. In the end, names of the interviewees were changed due to the sensitivity of the topic. I am fully aware that generalizations cannot be drawn from these 11 cases, however I hope the data I collected can open the ground for possible reconceptualization of the rescuers and further research in the same field.

The table 1.1. lists all interviewees and gives an overview of their age, ethnicity, gender, and city and whether they were helpers or helped ones.

Changed Name	Age	Ethnicity	City	Gender	Helper/Helped
Nedeljko	60	Serb	Bratunac	Male	Helper
Dragan	64	Serb	Bratunac	Male	Helper
Nermin	67	Bosniak	Bratunac	Male	Helped
Jaca	69	Serb	Bratunac	Female	Helper
Aco	40	Serb	Bratunac	Male	Helped
Hasan	49	Bosniak	Srebrenica	Male	Helper
Senad	62	Bosniak	Srebrenica	Male	Helped

Maksim	70	Serb	Srebrenica	Male	Helper
Ivan	73	Serb	Srebrenica	Male	Helper
Muhamed	69	Bosniak	Srebrenica	Male	Helper
Stanojka	57	Serb	Bratunac	Female	Helper

Srebrenica and Bratunac – two cities with difficult history

The eastern part of Bosnia's valley of Drina was one of the most affected areas when it comes to the conflict in Bosnia. This part of the country borders Serbia and has been known for the difficult periods and large scale of atrocities committed during the Second World War but also during the Bosnian conflict. These two periods left profound marks on the society and on the memories of citizens of the region. I grew up in this region immediately after the war, and I was largely affected by the war stories throughout my growing up period.

I chose Srebrenica and Bratunac as fields to conduct the research because they were the easiest places for me to get in contact with people. Due to the highly politicized situation, it is not easy to get in communication with the helpers, because they are not willing to share their stories. Thus, I find it important to record these stories in a society that went through such a large scale of violence. I conducted interviews with people whom I know, with parents of my friends, neighbors and acquaintances of my school friends. Thus, even though I had a difficult time in finding the sources, they were more accessible to me, instead of going to some other parts of Bosnia. In addition, choosing Srebrenica and Bratunac was a proper decision due to their ethnic composition. At the end, I find it important to give an account of the helping actions during the conflict in an area known only for mass atrocities.

Limitations

One of the limitations I can trace is that interviews are conducted twenty years after the conflict. However, as explained in the introduction of the chapter, oral history could still provide significant information. I would assume that as the consequence of remembrance, many of my encounters tend to idealize or give partial information about their deeds. Also, due to the sensitivity of the topic out of 11 interviews, nine were recorded while for 2 interviews I had to take notes on site because the interviewees refused to be recorded.

However, I took notes carefully and I was able afterwards to write additional participant observations. Another limitation is that their stories could be largely influenced by the current political and or personal situation. During the period of my research, the announcement of the Hague judgment for the war criminals influenced the overall situation in two cities. I was aware that every time the tribunal brings final decisions, the ethnic narrative between ethnic group sintensifies. Thus, I was aware that a well-planned study design, with precise questions was needed in order to acquire possible answers to the research questions. Also, when it comes to the gender representation, only two interviewees were women and nine of them were male. I took this sample due to the snowball method while the gender variable is not crucial for understanding of helping acts in this paper.

The final significant limitation is the issue of partiality. The number of rescuers in Bosnia is unknown and even the very term is not defined in the Bosnian context. Therefore, I will necessarily be in danger of jumping to conclusions. However, I would like to emphasize that I will not find truths or non-truths in this analysis, only self-understanding and understanding of acts of help. In the end, I assume that my interviewees are telling me the way they see themselves and understand their world. I am not seeking truth, but instead I try to comprehend the trend in how people understand themselves and what might have motivated them to act the way they did at a particular time. They told me their stories, and I retell them to the readers, and neither their story nor my retelling approximates any kind of truth of what happened back then. I also leave some space for the readers to observe data by themselves and make conclusions.

Empirical findings - ethnic identification and ethnic detachment examined

While talking with one of my interviewees about the pre-war period in Srebrenica and what many of mine encounters would characterize as *sense of coexistence* in Tito's Yugoslavia, usually I would ask how life was before the war and how people treated each other. He answered: "You go in Marlboro, right? So, you see the people there, how they interact and behave, how we talk....so it was the same as in Marlboro, just the same".²⁵³ My interviewee was

²⁵³ Interview with Muhamed in Srebrenica, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

referring to a small rock café, “Marlboro” in Srebrenica, where most citizens gather to listen to rock music while discussing daily political problems and retelling famous Bosnian jokes. He tried to symbolize small communal life represented in café Marlboro as an escape zone where all individuals are equal and where the idea of who is who is disregarded. Through my research, I find that ethnicity matters in day-to-day lives of people, but it is not hatred-based as is often suggested. Ethnicity matters for organizing the daily life, but ethnicity is not main driving force of animosity. Ethnicity is in a way the fabric of society.

Academics dealing with the Bosnian society have a hard time understanding that ethnicity can be important in bringing about good things. As Lee Ann Fuji explained, even though ethnicity was important in organizing society, it was not the main trigger for the ethnic conflict. The ethnicity of people in the room always gives us information and provides us with contextual clues. It helps everyone understand everyone else, and in a way, it functions like the water for fish. It is interesting that most of the people are hardly aware that they are spending most of their lives in the water. This is how Stanojka, a Serb who helped her Muslim neighbors while hiding them in her house, explains what was important for her in relation to the other ethnicities:

“Witness at our wedding was Nihad Đozić and my godmother was Marica Ivancic, so she was a Catholic and he was a Muslim, and to us it did not matter. It was important that we were friends and none of us put religion at the first place. It is somewhere in each of us, that complex identity.”²⁵⁴

The concept of best man and godmother was a way of ethnic crossing and ethnic negotiation. I highlighted in the context chapter how friendship bounds were operating across the ethnic divides. As I explained, strong intimate bounds would provide people with a sense of sameness and togetherness. Similarly, the idea of friendship was the platform for indifference toward the ethnicity and for the ethnic boundary crossing. Within theoretical chapter it was discussed that ethnicity was silent during the war and it acquired an ethnic dimension only once scholars labeled the conflict in Bosnia as an ethnic conflict with strong ancient hatreds. Also, within the complexity of identity and belonging in Yugoslavia where one could perceive self-identity in multiple ways such as

²⁵⁴ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

Sarajevan, Yugoslav, and in a same time as Serb/Bosniak/Croat—provided helpers during the conflict with the ability to shift among different identities. Besides above-mentioned identities, they would rather identify with locality, community and friendship instead across the ethnic lines. This is to say that ethnic identity was never a fixed category.

But the war in Bosnia employed the fear by ethno-nationalists that urged ordinary people to take a side and identify as a member of the group for the sake of security, protection and overall position in society. I am highlighting that during the conversation mine encounters have looked at humans as humans and not as members of the ethnic groups. The helpers' identity would rather connect to humanity, as explained in theoretical framework and act in sameness. My interviewee Stanojka explains her motivation to act as a helper by saying:

“The first thing to look at is to be a man at the first place. I did not ask for a name, but I was looking forward to seeing how I can help to someone and open the door of my house. To help.... this is the essence”.²⁵⁵

As I mentioned in the chapter where I discuss the role of neighborliness, the open doors of the house represent the openness of people. Since my aim is to understand the specificities of the acts of rescuing during the Bosnian conflict by answering questions related to the identity and motivation of the people who have carried out such acts. I found out that helpers were not influenced by imposed ethnic mobilization that seeks to do harm to others in the name of ethnic belonging. They rather acquire the idea of neighborliness and friendship as a counter narrative toward ethnic mobilization. Through the proximity of life, helpers were able to see their identity in connection to humanity, rather than ethnicity. Explained in Stanojka words, “I am a human being, and you are a human being, so what's the problem then”? According to her, and as mentioned in the theoretical framework, we all have choices and we make these choices because of our relations to the other, or our self-understanding. Additionally, friendship ties across the ethnic lines were one of the main motivators. Friendship would come as a primary identifier.

“But we are all afraid, all have the same fear. The fear is that you lose friends, that someone may kill and torture them. I had this fear, so what happened to

²⁵⁵ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

us, it will happen to them anyway. It is in fact this time the right choice, you have a choice and we have made that choice, others did not, and they closed their homes. We all make choices. We later found out that that some neighbors reported to the paramilitary units' that we are hiding Muslims. They searched for us and because they wanted to mistreat us. That was the price at the end".²⁵⁶

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, identity provides helpers with a choice to act. Stanojka shows strong self-integrity and strong identity that forced her to act, or as Monroe mentions, there is no other choice left than to act. Through further narration, I found out that Stanojka's identity was stripped from the notion of ethnicity. She would not use ethnic categories in her narration, only ideas such as *human, man and people*. The crucial moment for her to act was the idea that she grew up with the people that live in the house next to her and being in proximity of habitation made her believe in the sameness of people, or of people as being one category.

Listening to stories about perpetrators' acts during the conflict, I was interested in understanding how come that, on one side, there is a war between Serbs and Muslims; paramilitary Serb formations are entering into the city and killing people, while, on the other side, you are hiding together in the basement with your Bosniak friends. I could not understand the absurdity of the situation of different ethnicities being in war but at the same time helping each other, and hiding each other from those people who followed the ethno-national narrative. Nedeljko is a Serb from Bratunac who helped his Muslim friends during the war while hiding together in basement of his house. He explained to me:

"Real Serb would never kill Dzevad and Dzemo. I don't know who those people were.

But they were not real Serb for sure. Friendship and friendship ties. I was also helping Croats".²⁵⁷

As this quote shows, ethnic indifference is not the only strategy of the helpers to relate to the social world around themselves. To Nedeljko, it is important that he is a Serb and he negotiates the 'Serbness' of those carrying out the inhumane acts. Thus, the in group is not only defined by ethnic terms but also

²⁵⁶ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁵⁷ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

by the values one can relate to. According to Nedeljko's narration, there are two categories of ethnic groups and he identifies with the one, which he calls "the right one". He differentiates between those who are for peaceful coexistence and those who were committing mass atrocities in the region. He perceives his ethnic identity as a Serb as an identity that will never commit such crimes, or even more, it would rather help his fellow citizens who have the same identity as he has – the identity that believes in justice and decency. Therefore, the same identity among the groups regardless their ethnicity for Nedeljko is:

"I will always help decent people and people with a sense of justice. They were not guilty for what happened".²⁵⁸

Nedeljko further emphasizes that what happened is largely the responsibility of ethnic elites, and according to him, there were people who did not want to follow the same logic. They rejected the largely employed idea of ethnicities being against each other. They were able to stay ethnically indifferent to the utilized ethnic prejudices as well. Maksim, a Serb from Srebrenica who provided accommodation to his Bosniak friend when the conflict was at its height, tried to explain to me the concept of ethnicity, but he immediately started to talk about humans deprived from their ethnic belonging. Similarly to Nedeljko, Maksim also distinguished between groups. For him, individuals based their identity not on ethnicity, but rather on human values. This was one of his main motivations to act as a helper:

"For me there is only one human value, there are good and bad people. Only after that we should differentiate between people. I am personally convinced that God is only one. God is one and faiths are different. We all pray to the same God, just in different ways. Science has proven that the DNA structure is the same for everyone. After all, in the world of religion it is written, for Orthodox there is Adam and Eve and, in the Quran Adam, and Hava. It is the same thing".²⁵⁹

Finding similarities in different religions and between groups is a way to see shared humanity with others. As mentioned within the theoretical framework, it enables individuals to feel how it is being in the others' shoes. Since the helpers were able to see similarities among ethnically different groups despite

²⁵⁸ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁵⁹ Interview with Maksim in Srebrenica, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

the imposed ethnic mobilization, they were thus able to stay ethnically detached from ongoing mobilization. Some of my encounters told me that they would spend so much time together even during the war that it was not possible to think that there is any kind of conflict among them.

“Would you believe me that a lot of times I remember, we would come to school and meet in the night, or during the day? We would seat and talk. I think, dear God, if someone were filming us, he would wonder whether it is possible that these people are at war. There are so many memories of those good old days, so many good and nice stories about my fellow Muslims. We do not make a difference, not really. For me, what is important is the man”.²⁶⁰

The man as a concept within the narrations of my encounters is a man without ethnic belonging, he/she is just a man – a human being. We saw that Maksim, Nedeljko and Stanojka would imply the same logic. Negotiation of ethnicity in Bosnia was possible due to the mixture of people in rural areas. Cultural differences among groups existed so that the groups can communicate these differences. Daily negotiation among the groups brought good and deep personal relations where many of my encounters could not believe that the war was about to come. As Ivan, a Serb that was helped by his Bosniak friend who drove him in the village in a so-called Serb territory, explained to me:

“I was always surprised, how it is possible that we are going to fight against each other, how? It is like you once put the corn, pumpkin seeds and beans, all put in a bowl and mixed up and you are going to plant this. It was called “sačma”. So, we are in Bosnia like this “sačma”. We are planted house to house. Field to field. We did not even notice that the war was starting. We hear some shootings, but we never thought it would come to that..... And even during the war we stayed in good relations”.²⁶¹

The narrative of ethnicity as a main problem within the society is still dominant within political discourse and the helpers during the conflict are afraid of being punished if they speak up about their deeds. I found out that even though within some of my encounters' narration I could trace that they were part of

²⁶⁰ Interview with Maksim in Srebrenica, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁶¹ Interview with Ivan in Srebrenica, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

the whole imposed narrative and they would identify as a particular ethnicity during the narration, this does not mean that they would conduct inhuman acts in the name of that ethnicity. As explained by Nedeljko, a Serb who was protecting his Bosniak friends, the people who conducted acts of killing were:

“Those were bloodthirsty people. They came to rob the houses. So, they saw Dzemo’s and Dzevad house as nice and big. They wanted that house. So that is why they kill them. After that, they moved in the house. Greediness, nothing else”.²⁶²

For the people who do not feel ethnical in a particular moment their social exclusion was regularly demonstrated by political elites. That can mean a variety of things, but importantly it can mean segregation and limited chances of access to the economy and job market. It was interesting for me to notice that even now, twenty years after the war, helpers would rather remain silent about their deeds. They would know among each other who helped whom during the war, they would talk in coffee breaks about those times, but going out publicly with a story would be a problem for them. As it was explained to me:

“There are some crazy people in each group, they still use ethno-nationalism to fear many. Mainly politicians. So, it is better to remain silent because of my family and my friends. If I talk, maybe those whom I helped could also have problems with their groups, so I am aware of it”.²⁶³

Some of the helpers even after the show that they do not care for ethnic narratives in the region, especially competing narrative of victimhood. As Stanojka explained to me:

“I am still going on the commemorations of my Muslim friends, the victims of war, victims who were my friends. Those were just civilians and they did not have anything to do with it at all”.²⁶⁴

Within this article I argued that helpers during the conflict stayed indifferent toward imposed ethnic mobilization. Since they were able to perceive ethnicity as a salient factor in the conflict that was portrayed as ethnically driven, they were able to conduct the acts of help. I have been examining what were the

²⁶² Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁶³ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁶⁴ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

common identity characteristics of helpers in context such as Bosnia and how they are connected to ethnicity. It has been shown that ethnicity does not necessarily implies bad elements, as often being associated in ethno-political and war narratives. Deconstruction of the very notion of the ethnicity and its connection to helpers have shown that helpers did not perceived their self strongly attached to belonging to one group, but rather finding sameness in all humans. But the question what motives them to stay indifferent toward ethnicity and thus conduct acts of help will be further answered in the next chapter through the main identifiers– *neighborliness and friendship*. All introduced concepts are going above and across ethnicity, serving more as individual identifiers connected to community but in the same way stripped from ethnicity.

Helping hand across the neighborly lines

During the fieldwork it was particularly challenging to approach people with the notion of the rescuer, so I easily switched my initial question and asked if they know people helping each other during the war. I went to visit Sejo, a man in his mid-fifties in a village near Srebrenica. I have known Sejo for some years, but never thought that he had an experience of being helped and protected by a Serb soldier during the Genocide in Srebrenica. When I entered the room where Sejo lives, I noticed a photograph attached to the old wall clock. I asked: “Who is that man?” – “Well, this is my komšija (neighbor) Dragan with my father,” he responded, “he is a Serb living up, near my house.” It was interesting to me that he keeps the photo of his father who was killed in Genocide with a Dragan (Serb guy) on the wall. I immediately started to question Sejo about pre-war and post-war relation in the village. The komšiluk theme just randomly occurred and he started to explain to me the komšiluk relationship with his friend Dragan before the war. In a way, Sejo used komšiluk to try to explain how ethnicity was not such an important category, or at least it will come as an unimportant identifier.

„His house was mine, and my house was his. That is how we lived. In the same manner as I entered my house, he would enter too, so there were no differences. The same goes for me, I would enter his house almost every day, as it was my house. My mother used to cook for us to eat and it was also for him, but, as his mother was cooking, it has been on the table for me. We never had that distinction. All Serb houses here, up

to these hills, it was all an integral part of our lives. We all knew each other, we played together, we kept the livestock together, went to school together, got married and said goodbye to people who were dying. We would welcome the new borns, celebrate each other's holidays, in all kinds of works.... It is like a family²⁶⁵.

In rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the household is central to the imagination of belonging and the household is also the place where inter-ethnic interactions take place through mutual visits, lunches and coffees. As mentioned in the chapter on neighborliness, Sejo and his friend Dragan would visit each other almost every day where the household served as a platform for interethnic communication. It helped diminish the ethnic identification and acquire more community-based identity. Since Sejo mentioned to me that Dragan, his neighbor, played the key role in his escape and salvation from the genocide, I was interested to hear about that. Sejo told me that this was the reason he keeps the photo on the wall because Dragan is the reason, he is alive today. He managed to escape from the Srebrenica Genocide due to the help of the Serb soldier:

“I managed to cross through 2 barricades, but on the third I slipped on some branches and fell. One of the guardians on the barricades came and put a gun on my face, but the other soldier came and told him to stop. I thought it is over. That soldier picked me up and told me not to be afraid. He told me he knew me. He gives me cigarettes and he explained to me how to get on the way, since there was a minefield there. He knew everything about me. Who my father was and who my brother and mother were. However, I could not recall his face. And he told me to go now and not to turn back and very soon I would come on my territory. After, I realized he was coming to Dragan's house and that is how he knew me, he was Dragan's cousin”²⁶⁶.

Since I wanted to understand the specificities of the acts of helping during the Bosnian conflict by answering questions related to the identity and motivation of the people who have carried out such acts, I have asked Sejo what he thinks, what was the motivation behind:

²⁶⁵ Interview with Sejo in Srebrenica, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁶⁶ Interview with Sejo in Srebrenica, May 2016.

“I think one of the main reasons was that he knew me, and the other that a human side how to do evil to someone with whom you have some sort of relation, relationship, you know? I cannot remember exactly the figure of that man out of my fear, but until today, it stuck to my mind his moral sense of responsibility. It is moral sense of the man toward man that did not allow him to do something bad, at that moment to me”.²⁶⁷

Thus, long extended contact across the neighborhood lines was crucial for one to act as a helper. His helper knew him because he was coming often in Sejo’s *komšiluk*. According to Sejo, the idea of connectedness across the neighborhood lines was crucial for a Serb soldier to act as a helper. Afterwards, Sejo discovered that it was a cousin of his best friend Dragan, one of the reasons he keeps the picture of Dragan and his father under the clock. Because of that event, he decided to plant a field of raspberries together with Dragan, so that they can work together and see each other more often. He concluded that even though bad things happened during the war; he lost his father; he can never forget the periods before the war when all of them lived as a family and he is willing to continue to live like that. During the war, *komšiluk* was obliged to protect their own houses, but he was regularly visiting Dragan and Dragan was regularly coming to Sejo house, and this is where people managed to cross ethnic ties and seek security within their neighborliness – *komšiluk*.

I described in the theoretical framework that, in order to show a helping hand, you are supposed to have knowledge about the helped, and this was the case with Sejo. Additionally, ‘opened’ and ‘closed’ doors of the house as a central metaphor for the openness and closeness of the people is also present in Sejo’s narration. This was the crucial moment in order to overcome ethnic mobilization and to remain good friends even after the war. Open doors of both houses help them overcome fears and continue their friendship through the business. I have asked Sejo why he came back from the Netherlands to his hometown when he used to have a good job there, while in Bosnia he is jobless. It is almost two years that he has been living in Srebrenica. He explained to me:

“You know, those images of that soldier, giving me a cigarette and showing me the road while I am shaking from the shock, are chasing me all my life. I think

²⁶⁷ Interview with Sejo in Srebrenica, May 2016.

besides being homesick, a big part of my return to Bosnia is my wish to find this man. I am still searching, but I will find him one day. I cannot explain this; this is something stronger than you can imagine”.²⁶⁸

With Nedeljko, my second encounter, I had the longest conversation that lasted around two hours. He protected his Bosniak friends in a basement during the war. During the conflict, he also drove them through the barricades to the local hospital. I was interested to hear about the relation during the war between friends and neighbors and Nedeljko explained to me how it was common in their community to form local neighborhood joint militias consisting of both Muslims and Serbs:

„Many Muslims stayed in the city. No one bothered them and we respected each other and helped each other until those dogs of war came who already felt some of the battlefields. Those people were blood thirsty. Because of them, we had joint guards here, Muslims and Serbs together. Precisely because of those sideward people”.²⁶⁹

He put effort into explaining to me the pre-war period when inter-ethnic relations were defining their lives, but diversity was respected, nevertheless. Nedeljko used to go and pray together with his friends in the mosque, regardless of his ethnicity and religious background. This helped him internalize the ethnic diversity that did not lead to violence but instead to mutual help and respect. His Bosniak friends used to live just three houses away from Nedeljko. So, it was natural to him that they would go hiding together during the war. Thus, *komšiluk* was a way of resisting the dominant ethno-nationalistic discourse because *komšiluk* as a microcosm would successfully deny the primacy of ethnic bounds. In such a way, they would avoid ethno-nationalist groups. Ethnicity as a tool of mobilization was a non-existing category for him. According to Nedeljko, they knew that they were in war, Serbs and Bosniak, but he described that there would be always people who do not follow dominant political opinions: “I do not have anything with it. Dissenting people should be respected and those were the people that did not have any colors inside, no prejudices toward other nations, cosmopolitans”.²⁷⁰ Nedeljko strongly identifies with the idea of humans, as he calls it, since he

²⁶⁸ Interview with Sejo in Srebrenica, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁶⁹ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁷⁰ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

emphasizes that he felt it. The idea of sameness embodied in humanity was present and it helped him cross ethnic lines.

I was interested to hear what Nedeljko's motivation was to help and hide his neighbors in the basement. Obviously, a long-extended friendship through the neighborhood lines as described within the context framework was crucial for him. Neighborhood as explained in the idea of living together in the communal fields while pursuing intimate knowledge of one another appears once more. Nedeljko explained to me his motivation by saying,

“There was no motivation, you know, it is human thing to do, you just go, and something above you leads you to do this. I simply did not think about it and lastly, it was the only possibility”²⁷¹

For Nedeljko not helping was not an option, since, as he explained, they knew each other all life, they were friends. According to him, to feel that this is a human thing to do is to feel that ethnic identity is a second identifier, or it is not an identifier at all. Somehow, the ethnic identity as employed by ethno-national leaders would take second place or no place at all. Similarly, Jadranka focused on clarifying to me just how significant *komšiluk* was – so much so that there was no chance to leave behind people who were threatened by nationalists. There was a possibility to transcend the ethnic coding bias that was surrounding the idea of *komšiluk* to feel more human instead of ethnic and to help one's friends in danger. Thus, *komšiluk* was a way of resisting dominant ethno-nationalism:

I heard from many people that you conducted acts of help during the war?

“That was something my mother was doing. She saved our *komšiluk*, she put make-up on young boys, put some women's dresses on them, so that they could not notice if they are men or woman. She saved many of them. She would let them go over Drina River. If she had not done that, they would have probably died here. Even today, I love Muslims. I have friends Muslims. Nothing bothers me.”

²⁷¹ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

Did you save and help your mother?

“I took them over the bridge also, together with my mother. It did not matter that we were Serbs. We lived together and we have been companions, we grew up together and we were raised together”.²⁷²

The proximity of habitation in neighborliness produced the sense of indifference toward the imposed ethno-national mobilization. As I observed many times in the society where I grew up, living together (*zajedno*) is a matter of eating together, and living in proximity (in *komšiluk*) it is a matter of mutuality between next-door neighbors. *Komšiluk* solidarity was stronger than ethnic solidarity in case of Jadranka.

Muhamed has the same perception, and he provided his definition of neighborhood-life. He helped several Serb fellow citizens, as he would call them. His definition of locality weakened the fear and ethnic mobilization employed by the political apparatus and maintain *komšiluk* traditional norms of mutual respect, coexistence and intimate knowledge about each other alive. For Muhamed, the proximity of habitation with almost keen ties was the motivation for him to act as a helper during the war.

What was your motivation, to help someone during the war?

“My motivation was to place people out of danger, those innocent and irresponsible Justice motivated me.”

Those were your friends?

“Those were my fellow citizens...*komšiluk*, but former *komšiluk* where *komšija* was more important than your own brother”.²⁷³

The rationale behind the neighborhood approach is that individuals generally spent a lot of time in that environment, so that trusting attitudes are thought to be most affected by this immediate social context and less so by larger regional or even national contexts. In this sense, the particularity of locality played the crucial role. This represents the idea according to which neighbors become as family members due to the proximity of cohabitation. At the end

²⁷² Interview with Jadranka in Bratunac, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁷³ Interview with Muhamed, Srebrenica February 2016. (in the author's archive)

of my research, I met Stanojka, and she symbolizes what authors of Holocaust studies acknowledge as a multiple rescuer. Within her narration, I could trace several acts of help that Stanojka was mentioning just randomly. The notion of *komšilik* and gender solidarity was present all the time:

“There were several women in Bratunac we knew, Muslim women. Vesna, me, Mira and Stanka, we knew where those women lived, where their apartments were. They were either old or have been alone. They had no children. We would gather and bring them some food. It was a war, the bakery was not working, shops as well, they were closed.... It was a miracle that they survived. We would cook something, put it in big plates and bring it to them, so that it can last for several days, because they did not go out from their apartments, their houses. That was *komšilik* solidarity. The thing is all of us, we think the same, and that was the essence”²⁷⁴

Based on Stanojka’s narrative, it could be recognized that those who were able to integrate, maintain and cultivate friendships across the neighborhood’s microcosms, were able to maintain community in a trans-ethnic way and thus commit acts of help. In that manner, several women gathered and decided that they were going to help their Muslim friends, because it was, as Stanojka explained, *komšilik* solidarity, that have answered the question about the helper’s motivation. The ideas of sameness are present constantly, as she explains that they all think the same, and she immediately saw all woman as equal to herself.

„I lived across the street from Jaca - Jasminka. She was my classmate from elementary school. That night my husband, and I, we went to our room to sleep, and as I was going to turn off the lights, I saw through the window that something unusual was happening in Jaca’s house. I saw how Jaca was taking off her shirt while her father was in the room and her mother and some other people. It was an abnormal situation, an abnormal to take off your shirt in front of your father. My husband had better eyes and he noticed that those people were armed. I went literally in my pajamas and barefoot in Jasminka house. I asked them what they were doing. They told me that this was not my business. They were anyway ustashe. I told them those were not ustashe; those were

²⁷⁴ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

Jaca and her father and her mother. My husband went to call my father-in-law because he had a gun. He entered the room, he told Jaca to get dressed, and he told her mother and her father, you are my komšije, you should come to my house. Those people started to threaten him, but he raised the gun and told them: what do you want I am Serb as well”.²⁷⁵

We can see from this quote how neighborliness was a platform for helpers in which they would feel indifference toward imposed ethnicity. Stanojka was able to stay ethnically indifferent and to observe her neighbors as humans and individuals, not giving special credits for the membership into specific ethnic groups. I asked Stanojka what her motivation to help her neighbors was. She replied,

“I don’t know. This was a reaction, you know. This is my friend, you understand, my friend. Then, you just do not think what will happen to you. I did not think what will happen to me. My husband was thinking better than me because once we saw what was happening in Jaca’s house, he went to take a gun”.²⁷⁶

Paramilitary units would come to Stanojka’s house to check if there were some Muslims people, as they would refer, hiding at her place. However, they would persistently try to help and hide them.

“They would come to our house and ask for something. They said that we help the Turks, Balije²⁷⁷. To them we were hiding people. They did not of course find anyone. My father-in-law told me that when darkness falls, I should go into our *komšiluk* and gather children, girls, and young women. They would come to sleep with us. All of those Muslim neighbors, what was left around our *komšiluk*, would come to our house”.²⁷⁸

The question why people save each other’s lives in connection to *komšiluk*, we can understand through the ethics of the *komšiluk*, described within the provided context where people live with each other rather than next to each other. Thus, I found that the *komšiluk* bonds and values promote positive tolerance within the neighborhood relations and facilitate active care of

²⁷⁵ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁷⁶ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁷⁷ It is a derogatory term used against the Muslim population.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Stanojka in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author’s archive)

ordinary neighbors between different ethnic groups, which is in a way the main postulate of the *komšiluk* ethics. I conclude that the idea of living together very close, as described ‘side by side,’ while accepting and nurturing the differences, brought more positive influence and deeds, and opposed the violence employed largely by paramilitary units.

Helping hand and friendship ties

This segment of article seeks to underline that not only proximity of life in neighborliness but also long friendship across ethnic lines was a main motivator for helpers to feel indifference toward ethnicity. During the fieldwork, I was trying to get as much information as possible from my interviewees and to make the situation as comfortable as possible for the participants. I also contacted the friends’ journalist from the region who helped me to conduct interviews. One of the first encounters was Nermin and Dragan, a helper and a helped one. I was lucky that I could organize interviews with both sides. First, I conducted the interview with Dragan, and I realized that helping used to come in different forms, from food supplies and hiding together in the basement to driving to the other city. After the war, Dragan and his friend Nermin both still live in the same city and, more importantly, see each other almost every day. I was also more than happy when I noticed that their stories are complementary. When I compared my main findings, I started to look how the act of helping was used within the participant narration. Dragan explained to me how the situation proceeded with his friend Nermin by saying,

“He was labelled as the participant in some kind of a Muslim protest here in the city. It was dangerous for him afterwards. One day he called me, came to my apartment and asked me to drive him from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje. What could I do back then? I could not say no, do not go. This was his wish and I put him in my car and drove him directly to Konjevic Polje. There I left him, in Konjevic Polje, and it was completely deserted. There were no people on the street at all. Already there was some tension growing. When I went back, I felt uncomfortable from the realization how everything was so deserted, there was no one out there. I felt fear I almost regretted what I did, why I put myself on this adventure”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Interview with Dragan in Bratunac, February 2016. (in the author’s archive)

Still, it was not clear to me then why he decided to do this, what the driving force for him was. Since my aim was to understand the specificities of the acts of helping during the Bosnian conflict by asking questions related to the identity and motivation of the people who have carried out such acts, I asked Dragan about his motivation.

What was your motivation for doing it after all?

“I did not think about that. The animosity did not increase to the level where I would consider him as an enemy. It was normal for me, as a friend, to drive him and I considered that I would not have any troubles by doing that afterwards”.

But still, you could say I cannot, for instance, I do not have fuel?

“I could not refuse him; I did not think about that because I consider him as my friend. You can do that much for your friend, right”.

So, he was a good friend?

“Well, yes. We hang out together, go hunting together, play cards. As all of us, we grew up together, we are a generation.”

Then, how would you define your friendship?

“We hang out really intensely, go out in cafes, and watch a football and comment on it, root for a team. Simple”.

Do you consider that you did something special?

“Well, it is very normal for humankind that a friend helps a friend.”
Without the regard for the ethnic background?“

Without?

„I grew up without prejudices, without ethnic divisions and when someone asks me, it is really uncomfortable to me to explain this. People lived together and they lived in harmony without any prejudices, there was no possibility to create them in that period“.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Interview with Dragan in Bratunac, February 2016. (in the author's archive)

From Dragan's perspective we can observe that the idea of the intimate friendship was the dominant motivator. The contact with Nermin, his Muslim friend, would include growing up together, seeing each other in the café and loving the same sports. There is a clear indication of the self-reflection and intimacy through the friendship as mentioned within the context chapter. For him, ethnic boundaries are not sharply defined and thus the creating prejudice was not possible due to his extended and long friendship with Nermin. As I explained in the subchapter on friendship ties, friendship refers to the attachments people make to places or people with whom they feel intensely interconnected, related, affiliated and identified. Thus, friendship bonds for Dragan and Nermin remain real and ever-present internally even if the sources are externally transformed, and they were transformed due to the war situation. However, for Dragan and Nermin this was not the case. Also, when I asked Nermin if he knows what Dragan's motivation was for conducting the acts of help, he explained to me:

“It was on the road to one Serb village; a crew consisting of five to six people fully equipped with guns, they let us pass the barricade because they knew him, but they also knew me as well. Therefore, we go further... and I expected that in the Muslim enclave we would jump on guards there. However, there was no air, no birds, no sound, there was no light, nothing on the road. This was one terrible silence. Nevertheless, while crossing Kravica, we came across Serb guardians, around 5, 6 people, and we stayed there for a long time and this was the moment when he played a key role in my extraction. I could have ended there. We said goodbye to each other on the crossroads and from that moment, I was worried what could happen to him on his return. If I knew that Dragan had at least a little tainted heart and soul, there would be no conversation between us. Nothing could make me want to stay near a man who destroyed, slaughtered and robbed. Moreover, I have no doubt that there were so many cases in our city where people helped each other, I know it²⁸¹.”

I question what encourages helpers to stay indifferent toward ethnicity and to conduct the acts of help. Friendship, together with neighborliness, as described above, were the main factors. Sometimes pre-war friendship was

²⁸¹ Interview with Nermin in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

deep and strong, almost equal to the bonds of kinship and “blood relations. Thus, through the friendship relations, Nermin and Dragan were able to leave aside ethnic identities and thus feel ethnically detached to the war situation. In this manner, Dragan was able to leave aside the notion what could happen to him if he goes in the care with a Muslim through the several barricades. His idea was that you can do that much for your friend.

The other interviewee was Hasan who protected and helped Serbs in Srebrenica during 1993 and 1994. Being at a high position back then, he was able to take care and send people to the Serb houses in order to stand guard if paramilitary units show up. On the question if he could tell me something about himself and if he remembers what the inter-ethnic relations in his community Hasan was explaining to me,

„Our greatest friends used to be Serbs, we really respected each other, our best friends and girlfriends were of Serb nationality. Srebrenica was never nationalistically charged, we lived as one soul. My best friends were Serbs, we’d go out and drink – me, Brano, Savo, Vlado, and so on. We had a terrific clique, we used to hang out“²⁸²

He would continue his explanations while stressing that there was no perception of strong in-group and out-group ethnic division but rather a common sense of people being in one group with the same values and outsiders as those who do not share these principles. He brought up the idea of common humanity, as he calls it “we are one people,” transcending ethnic identity; the most important thing for him were inter-personal relations which mean, in a way, understanding how good friendships operates. Thus, good friendship relation was a main motivator for Hasan to act as a helper.

“But I thought that there should be good people and bad people, regardless of what nation they’re coming from, and that’s how I was sentenced to death four times here by the Bosniaks. I didn’t let them kill the Serbs in Srebrenica...I mean, we are one people. Nowadays, people go over from Serbs to Islam, or Catholicism. Or a Muslim becomes Orthodox, and so on. That’s citizens’ freedom; I care only about how you relate to me; how you relate to God is your problem“²⁸³

²⁸² Interview with Hasan in Srebrenica, February 2016. (in the author’s archive)

²⁸³ Interview with Hasan in Srebrenica, February 2016.(in the author’s archive)

One of the common themes I found interesting is that direct contact did not include only friendships but also romantic relations. Both Hasan and Nedeljko were mentioning the girlfriends from other ethnic groups as something positive and as a proof of the strong contact. He would continue to explain to me how strong the friendship was, that he as an Orthodox would go to pray in a mosque together with his friends. This represents the idea of diversification as introduced by Oliner and Oliner in the theoretical chapter. It implies personal close relations among the individuals in the group, and it requires a shift from the intergroup relations to the interpersonal relations that are closer and more intimate. Thus, an individual can be observed as an individual, and not as a member of a group. Nedeljko was able to diversify his relations with his best friends and to cross the ethnic group boundness.

“All of my friends in one period went in school and in the mosque as well. Even me, I went in the mosque to pray with them. I went there. I was interested, as a young boy, I had 12, 13 years, I went to see what they learn there, how this function. Everything with friends, everything with your comrades”.²⁸⁴

But it must be stressed that during the war imposed ethnic mobilization was so high. Nedeljko explained to me that people who were coming to their city, committing crimes and massive killings, were not known to community at all. This was common dimension of the warfare in Bosnia. He continued to explain events after he helped two friends who were afterwards killed by unknown soldiers.

“Both of my friends were killed. Džemo and Dževad. Greed. Some paramilitaries, which entered the town, those dogs of war... I got back from the battle lines one day. It was in 1993. I got home, and my father was sitting on the balcony. It was half past ten in the morning. End of summer, so it was sunny. I heard someone going on the street and screaming for her sons. I asked my father what was that all about and he stood up and went back to the room. I went after him and asked him again. He said that some unknown people came and tied Džemo and Dževad with wire and took them away. The woman was still screaming. It was over. Greed. Those people thought that they were unreachable and that they could do whatever they wanted. They thought they were

²⁸⁴ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

to build a country for us by taking other people's property and killing people. We went to military prisons to see if we could find them. We asked everybody. We couldn't find them. We were looking everywhere, but no one would say a thing. No one knew anything or they were afraid to speak. They were not in any of the prisons, that was for sure. They disappeared²⁸⁵.

The distinction between your group as being ethnically portrayed and the group of your friend loses its significance. In Nedeljko's case, growing up together made it impossible to put a boundary in between and to color it with any politically or ethnically driven mobilization. He continued to explain the nature of their bonds before the war that made him hide his friends in the basement and try to help them when paramilitary units surrounded the city.

"We would hang out together, go fishing and barbeque together. Nearby there was a river where we used to play. It was a great time. The bloody war, you see. On that same river where we spent our childhood together, this was where they killed and threw them. With no trace. Who knows where the river took them after that? They have no graves"²⁸⁶.

Aleksandar was one of the helped interviewees with a strong post-traumatic syndrome. He was kept in a detention place as a young boy, sixteen-year-old. All the images he explained to me were so vivid. The doctor, as he was referring to the man who rescued him from detention place was an important friend of his father. He risked his life several times while entering the detention place and trying to find Aleksandar. Extended friendship across the ethnic lines was one of the underlying factors for helpers to act.

"A man was looking for me in that detention. I heard someone calling out for me, but I did not dare answering. I thought somebody was looking for me in order to mistreat me...When I saw him, I recognized him. Rather, he knew me better because he would visit my father and they used to hang out together a lot. He wanted to take me away; however, some people didn't let him. Then, he said, if you don't allow this kid out, we all die. He then took me home with him. I hid there in the basement. There were quite a few people. They didn't know I was a Serb. When

²⁸⁵ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁸⁶ Interview with Nedeljko in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

they'd start talking something, I would play stupid and pretend to read some book".²⁸⁷

While asking Aleksandar if he knows what the possible motivation for the doctor to save him was, he answered:

"I don't know, believe me. I know we were family friends; he'd come visit us for as long as I can remember, he was into hunting and he was a doctor. My dad learned joinery at his place".²⁸⁸

One of the interesting things when it comes to the helping hands process was the common theme for most of my interviewee. They would categorize people locally by referring to them as *our Serbs*, and *our Muslims*, trying to differentiate between those who were entering in the cities and conducting ethnic cleansing. Thus, the importance of the inter-personal contact was emphasized once more through the idea of localism. However, this localism manifests itself in idea of proximity of habitation as explained in the analysis dealing with neighborliness relations.

I was interested to see how the act of helping was used within the participant narration. I try to trace what sort of a person is speaking and what sort of thing he or she is talking about. What sort of statement are made? What is being talked about? What cultural and historical categories people use in order to represent their experiences? What came as a theme even though it was not particularly emphasized during the interview? I found out that after neighborliness, intimate friendship as an extraordinarily strong life-long direct contact was the leading underlying factor for one to act. While reading repeatedly through the data, the common theme was emerging, and I realized that Oliner's idea of the rescuers having the sense with humanity was applicable in Bosnia where the sense of humanity was developed in connection to the neighborliness and long friendships. People were able to relate to "the other," to the out group, through the self, because of the several factors such as growing up with "the other," having intimate and romantic relations with "the other", in a way being strongly familiarized with "the other."

Additionally, I found out that the concepts of neighborhoods, friendship and ethnic indifference are important characteristics of Bosnian society when it

²⁸⁷ Interview with Aleksandar in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

²⁸⁸ Interview with Aleksandar in Bratunac, May 2016. (in the author's archive)

comes to the helping and they are going to be reviewed in the next analysis through the prism of the literature review, presented in the beginning. I will also return to the idea that helping should be introduced as a category or a subcategory of rescuing deeds known in Holocaust, due to the different cultural and social settings that we could observe in Bosnia, and that have already been highlighted through the concepts of *komšiluk* and friendship.

Conclusion

In relation to the Holocaust and rescuers, the most common question is directed toward understanding why one acts, and one does not, and how one becomes a rescuer, whereas another remains a bystander? Variables such as gender, religion and age were considered in order to try to comprehend the rescuers' deeds. From the presented literature review we can see that concepts such as strong self-integrity, self-identity, and altruistic behavior were just some of sociological and psychological explanations for the rescuer's motivation. But I was interested to see how the concept of rescuers operates in a different social and cultural setting, such as the Bosnian setting.

I wanted to trace what the matching points are when it comes to the theories of the rescuers' motivation, as known from the Holocaust and how we can apply this theory to the Bosnian helpers. Therefore, as we saw from the analysis presented above, people in Bosnia lived in close-knit communities in a multicultural setting where diversity in cultural, ethnic and other significant identities were main characteristic of society and where ethnicity was constantly negotiated through different platforms. I have learned that there is not a single essential precondition that predicts courageous behavior, however there is a constellation of known factors that encourage it. In the case of Bosnia, I traced *komšiluk* and friendships as important factors for the helpers' behavior. Furthermore, through proximity of life, living side by side and being directed to each other constantly throughout life events, was another main factor for helpers to stay ethnically detached to the war situation.

But how is this connected to the authors explaining the rescuers' behavior? I found out that through the *komšiluk* and friendship lines, helpers were able to see sameness with each other, or as Oliner and Oliner described, they would acquire "togetherness with humanity". Thus, these platforms added to the possibility of having one worldview when the differences among ethnic

groups were constantly emphasized throughout the conflict. This is the point from which I trace the importance of considering the different social and cultural settings in which helpers, or rescuers find themselves. Also, Kristine Monroe asks how relations to the others and personal self-identity influence helpers' behavior as described in theoretical discussion. Applying this to the Bosnian case, I could identify that the helpers' identity can internalize the differences before the war and thus to develop inclusive identity. Again, the internalization of the differences was possible through the platforms of *komšiluk* and friendship.

The question I posed was what motivated helpers and made them join the side of responsibility. What kind of identity or identification distinguished helpers? The possibility of ethnicity negotiation brought up what theoreticians of the rescuers distinguished (Staub, Monroe, and Oliner Oliner) as an important factor of motivation - the knowledge of the victims' plight. But in the case of Bosnian helpers, it is not only that they had knowledge about the victims' plight, but they also had deep knowledge about the daily life of their friends and neighbors. Growing up together and constantly negotiating ethnic differences thorough life was crucial for helpers. This facilitated them to develop comprehensive identity where strong sense of self, as underlined by Eva Fogelman, also requires the strong sense of the other. The other was not perceived as an enemy ethnicity, but rather as a friend, neighbor or human. Furthermore, helpers acquired a sense of justice through sameness, as they were able to cross the ethnic divides and conduct the acts of help.

The other thing I wanted to examine was whether the line between helpers and rescuers is rigid. Even though one can find the definition of the Righteous appropriate to the Holocaust situation, the definition is nevertheless limited because sheltering and aiding individuals who are marked for destruction (or in Bosnian case ethnic cleansing) would not be considered as a rescuing act if there was no risk involved. Thus, I switched to the category of helpers, defined as people who were not aware of the undertaken risk and were acting with inner sense of what is the right thing to do. As we saw from the analysis, they were providing food, driving across dangerous areas, or they were hiding together in basements. Within the article I highlight idea that a local dimension of living with your own in proximity, regardless of ethnicity, is the distinctiveness helpers in Bosnian context. Therefore, I claimed at the beginning of the article that we should rephrase the concept of rescuers from the Holocaust and seek

to understand other local, social and cultural dimensions across the range of conflicts.

Another important element must be added to this conclusion – I had very tough times finding my informants. I can say that this is very much in connection with the way the war was fought and with a kind of a peace was made. The peace arrangement in Bosnia and Herzegovina would bring nothing to people to step out and say, ‘I was a helper’, or ‘I was the helped one’. It can be even dangerous. I deem this as completely opposite situation when compared to Righteous. It is difficult to imagine that one would not want to be recognized as such. There have been many civil society initiatives trying to establish recognition for rescuing acts such *Gardens of the Righteous in Sarajevo* – initiative by Svetlana Broz, but so far without success. These consequences are tremendous to Bosnian society. What is needed is state recognition where higher instances are handing medals to helpers in Bosnia and Herzegovina for their courageous acts. As one of my encounters told me: *I believe that there will be time when more people will notice the importance of this kind of subjects. From that foundation we can build better world for all of us.*

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Sažetak

**POMAGAČI UPRKOS ETNIČKOJ PODJELI:
ULOGA KOMŠILUKA U DJELIMA SPAŠAVANJA
TOKOM SUKOBA U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI**

Autorica člankom ukazuje da su pomagači u toku rata u Bosni i Hercegovini indiferentni naspram dominantne etničke mobilizacije. Kroz analizu empirijskog tumačenja autorica ukazuje da je za internacionalizaciju razlika kao osnovne karakteristike pomagača u Bosni i Hercegovini bilo potrebno nekoliko bitnih faktora: zajedničko odrastanje u komšiluku, život u zajednici i dugoročne prijateljske veze. Članak doprinosi proširivanju akademskog i javnog diskursa na temu građanske i etničke solidarnosti obrađujući pitanja motivacije osoba koji su izbjavljali svoje komšije, sugrađane drugih pripadnosti od ratnog stradavanja i služi kao kontra narativ i dobro polazište za dalju diskusiju i priznavanje pomagača u ratu.