I Bid you Farewell

Cultural life of young Bosnians and "the state of things"

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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate how individuals structure their life within a post-conflict precarious country. Bosnia consists of three autonomous regions called Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine, Republika Srpska and Brčko Distrikt BiH. Since the early nineties, Bosnia has experienced ongoing emigration, encompassing both diaspora and migration communities as evidenced by the 1991 and 2013 censuses. In the last couple of years, news outlets have reported that at least two million people of Bosnian origin are now living abroad. The goal of my research is to investigate how everyday life and social cohesion within the country is affected by high levels of migration.

By relocating to Sarajevo for approximately two and a half months I have participated in daily life and documented the stories of the locals in Sarajevo and in rural areas outside of Gradiška. Partaking in Bosnian society allows for the possibility to see how routines and practices are performed by the local populace, with the goal to give a micro-perspective into the lives and mobility of people within precarious societies like Bosnia. The documentation of experiences and stories of interlocutors having either chosen to remain or leave, returned or already left the country behind, providing an idea of what building a life in Bosnia means and the future prospects the country offers its young population. The findings in these thesis indicate that economical challenges are not the main culprit for impeding the lives of young Bosnians, rather there is an intricate web of cultural restrictions, dwindling social circles and social instability; resulting in restricted and unpredictable futures of young adults.

Keywords: Bosnia, Balkan, anthropology, future, migration, distrust

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1. Introducing the thesis and the country in question

In recent years, discourse surrounding the brain drain in the Balkan region has gained increasing prominence, highlighting the long-term detrimental effects of depopulation on the area. It is evident that a significant demographic group, comprising young people with either an educated or skilled background, is diminishing in countries such as Bosnia, Montenegro, and Albania. This decline, however, is not a literal disappearance but rather a result of migration, often described as 'voting with their feet' (Icoski, 2022: 1). As migration gains momentum, it further leads to degradation of quality of life within these countries, with basic services suffering due to the high exodus, particularly of doctors and nurses. Moreover, professions such as mechanics and construction services are also experiencing a drain in manpower, leaving many businesses operating with skeleton crews. Often the exodus is motivated by the idea of "greener pastures" somewhere else which further debilitates the economy, infrastructure and welfare within the country (Icoski, 2022: 2). Importantly, this high outflow not only impacts the job market and local economy but also significantly affects the social fabric of those who remain in the country. Given these migratory patterns, the primary motivation for the study is the alarming rate of brain drain not only in Bosnia but in the Balkans.

1.1 Goals, aims and questions

This master's thesis aims to research everyday life of young adults between 20 and 33 years old. The investigation focuses on the mobility patterns of these individuals within Bosnian society, aiming to ascertain the potential impact of social conditions, such as diminishing social networks and inadequate social safeguards, on their quality of life. Moreover, the study seeks to explore whether such precarious circumstances influence their perspectives on future prospects. Fieldwork has been conducted in Sarajevo and the provincial north around the city of Gradiška. The empirical data will be analysed using theories derived from the anthropology of the future. This analysis aims to elucidate the dynamics of hope, examining its manifestations and decline within challenging social environments. This thesis primarily uses participatory observation methods and interviews as the principal means of data collection. The interviews vary from informal unstructured to formal semi-structured, having either been done individually or in groups of interlocutors. Narrative ethnography has also been employed to document the life stories and retellings of my interlocutors. Participant observations have been conducted within

locations, including social centres in Sarajevo, homes and a variety of public meeting spots. These spheres have been chosen as observation spots, as they represent the main insitutions for social life for the interlocutors.

This thesis will consider several sub-questions with the aim of deepening empirical understanding of current conditions within the country. The sub-questions in this thesis derive their relevance from contextualising the main question within a timeframe that extends beyond the past and present to encompass the envisioned future of my interlocutors and their perceptions of Bosnia as a society. By exploring the aspirations of its people and their considerations of the available material conditions and means for shaping their future, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these matters.

The sub-questions are to be found below:

1. Rooted or unrooted: are locals inclined to invest in their local communities, or do they opt to leave the country, possibly neglecting potential investments in friendships and relationships?

2. Career here or there: do the informants aim to advance their careers for a future in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or do they pursue temporary occupations with the intention of migrating after a set time frame?

3. Where does the future lie: how are the lives of interlocutors shaped by either being ‘left behind’ or creating new lives somewhere else?

4. The state of things: what do young adults strive for in their coming future which can or cannot be provided by Bosnian society and/or government?

5. Mobility or stationary: How does Bosnian society enable the possibility to create a fulfilling life in regards to work, social circle and security?

1.2 The structural arrangement of the thesis

In this thesis, the discussion begins by defining terminologies pertinent to Bosnia and its population. It then explores cultural factors influencing emigration decisions before delving into established scholarship on the Balkans, with a focus on Bosnia. After concluding the earlier science chapter, the thesis transitions to a discussion of the theories employed in the research and

the methodologies used for fieldwork and data collection. The method section provides a thorough exploration of methodological challenges encountered in the field, along with a discussion of limitations, ethical considerations and reflexivity on my role as a native anthropologist. The methodology section also contains a general description of the informants, including how they were identified and how their life stories and experiences in Bosnia is or has been shaped.

The final two sections that focus on empirical data are intertwined with different theories, creating cohesive links between data, theory and analysis. These sections predominantly feature transcriptions of interviews, although some interviews may be paraphrased due to the preferences of the interlocutors or the nature of the data collection methods. For instance, interviews conducted without a recorder may rely on paraphrasing, or they may be the result of recollections from participant observations. Finally the conclusions of the fieldwork will be brought forward and lay the foundation for potential future studies that can expand on the field.

1.3 Good morning Bosnia & Herzegovina! historical context and terminology

In this thesis, I will use the informal name 'Bosnia' to refer to the entire country, which comprises three administrative regions: Republika Srpska, Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine, and Brčko Distrikt BiH. Republika Srpska is predominantly serb populated with Banja Luka as an administrative capital. Translated, the second federal entity is named Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has Sarajevo as its capital. According to the governmental consensus from 11 years ago 55.11% of the population are Bosniaks, 30.78 are Serbs, 15,33 are Croats and the remaining 3% consist of 17 recognised minorities within the country (statistika, 2013).

Republika Srpska will be referred to as The Republic, or its official shortened name RS. Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine will be referred to as The Federation, or its officially shortened name FBiH. Lastly, the Brčko district, is a self-governing administrative unit, has not been subjected to fieldwork. According to the national demographic censuses from 1991 and 2013, there has been a 20% decrease in population from just under 4.3 million to slightly above 3.5 million (statistika, 1991 & 2013).

The accuracy of this population decrease is questionable due to war claiming a death toll of around 100 thousand people and two million displaced (Britannica, 2024). Recent reports indicate that at least two million people of Bosnian origin currently live outside of the county as independent demographic statistics not recognised by the Bosnian government indicate the population has decreased approximately 2.9 million, indicating that the population has decreased by 67% (Gubelić, 2023). One explanation for the inconsistency in what the population of Bosnia truly is due to many who have not registered their emigration to the authorities, further complicating correct estimates of emigration (Kovacevic, 2017).

The three entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina [FBiH, RS, and Brcko] emerged as a result of the civil war in the 1990s and were officially recognized with the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. The agreement was reached by the three at the time presidents Alija Izetbegović (Bosnia), Franjo Tuđman (Croatia), and Serbia Slobodan Milošević (Serbia), with the assistance of international mediators and diplomats. Meaning the Dayton Agreement is not the result of one individual, rather it is the result of negotiations involving multiple parties and international actors. Binding the three entities to each other was done with the intention to stop the ongoing conflict, caused by the previous separatist civil war. (Ní Aoláin, 1998: 971-972).

The tripartite system of FBiH, RS and Brcko has resulted in the country remaining divided outside the general elections, leading to deep rooted structural problems within the country. These structural problems stem from the autonomous status of the three entities, mostly caring for their own interests. The divided nature of Bosnian politics often regresses to antagonistic policies and rhetoric against each other. The divided nature of Bosnia thus resembles a fragmented society which is both separated and stateless, rather than a united country consisting of one nation and one people (Ní Aoláin, 1998: 973 & 975).

Until the last quarter of 2023, Bosnia has suffered from high unemployment rates peaking in 2006, with 31.1% unemployment. Unemployment between young adults reached 62.1% and did not drop below 50% for 11 years. Since the final quarter of 2023, Bosnia has a record-low unemployment rate of 12.7%, with a 29.8% unemployment rate between young adults (BHAS, 2023 & ILO, 2024). The labour market in Bosnia is characterised by low activity rates only reaching half of the EU average. Paradoxically, high unemployment rates are experienced together with skill shortages recorded around the country. The labour market of Bosnia has

stagnated due to high emigration numbers as vacancies keep on increasing nationwide due to a depleted labour reserve, especially between younger educated generations, motivated to seek employment abroad due to low workforce mobility within Bosnia (Kačapor-Džihić & Oruč, 2012).

2. The state of things - what do we know about the current situation of Bosnia

The exodus of people from Balkan region has reached unprecedented levels, with reports indicating that 56.4% of Bosnians currently reside abroad, a figure that appears to surpass the population remaining in their country of origin (Kovacevic, 2017). In Bosnia's case, the migration has potentially transformed into a form of cultural phenomenon. Migration from the country has stretched into Bosnian pop-culture and is often referenced by local bands like Dubioza Kolektiv with hits like “Kazu” released 2013, with lyrics about Bosnia described as the fifth country of the highest brain drain” and a country which nowadays are ‘only for relatives’ referring to the people left behind and occasionally visited by the country’s diaspora and migration community. The idea of migration being a cultural phenomena is further reinforced with mottos within university life in Bosnia like “da diplomiram, pa da emigriram” [translation: to graduate, to migrate] (Kovačević, 2018: 11), which further seems to cement the idea of migrating as an expected outcome for a successful life.

Furthermore, most of the material which deals with the brain drain in Balkan countries are few and far between, when found they are usually written in their native tongues and only occasionally written in English. Much of the literature on this topic relies heavily on quantitative studies, particularly within the field of political science, which employ questionnaires to gauge public perceptions of individuals' positions towards their governments and society. Political science studies often address the socio-political dynamics of Balkan societies, with particular emphasis on issues such as corruption, nationalism, and constraints within the labour market. Research that deals with how people are affected from a micro perspective within these countries are limited and more often than not they focus on nationalism and corruption rather than social mobility, future making and everyday practices. These studies also tend to focus on the older generations rather than young adults born from the 1990’s and onwards, thus studies done rarely touch upon the everyday life of young people who are left behind or have migrated from the country.

When youth are mentioned or researched within Bosnia or other Balkan countries, it is often within broader macro perspectives, empathising their discontent with the permanent state of precarity and the seemingly “absolute need” to migrate. Existing research fails to offer a visual depiction of the diverse struggles of everyday life or how individuals adapt and persevere within

these countries. For example, the 2018/2019 study conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung found that 60% of youth are unemployed, with one in five unable to secure employment for the past five years, and half struggling for two years. When discussing youth lifestyles, the study primarily highlights their engagement with social media and visits to cafés. While these studies offer valuable empirical material, they often lack depth in exploring the lived experiences of young people in these environments. They provide limited insight into their lives beyond noting that young individuals spend their free time engaging in activities described by their interlocutors as "doing nothing" (Turčilo et al, 2019:11 & 15-16). The statement above is arguably relevant to some degree but does not answer the anthropological question of how all the socio-political issues of Bosnia actually affect narratives and how the long-term effects of Bonian society moulds the people within it.

2.1 Which themes are prominent in contemporary Bosnia?

In the following part you will find a detailed description of the socio-political situation of Bosnia, which will mostly rely on the fields of political science and sociology. The motivation for using a macro perspective will give a clearer understanding of how Bosnian society and the state directly affects the livelihood of its population in a way which is relevant to the research question. The recurring theme of most of my interlocutors and answers from other studies is the talk about uncertainty and corruption which interfere with the idea of “normal life”.

How does the Bosnian state, along with its two federal entities, operate? Bosnia is often characterised as a so-called “transitional society” which are societies undergoing a shift from one system for another. As is common in such transitional states, issues like corruption, nepotism, and collaboration between political and criminal institutions pose significant challenges, leading to a government structure inherently characterised by kleptocracy. All the mentioned negative tendencies are usually the result of different forms of crisis, no matter if they are economic, cultural or political. Transitional countries are described as being in the process of establishing “neoliberal democracies” but without the “liberal values” usually associated with it (Kovačević, 2017: 9).

According to Kovačević, the civil war in the 1990s and subsequent international pressure for privatisation led to administrators being given responsibility of transforming Bosnia from a former socialist federal state to a free-market liberal democracy. These administrators were

inherently irresponsible party-bound oligarchs in cooperation with either family members or nepotistic colleagues from the same political background. In turn, the result became “rampant plunder” of Bosnia in something described as being done in a “Na Balkanski način” [in a Balkan fashion - which refers to the crippling rampant corruption stereotype generally associated with Balkan states]. He explains that this so-called “Balkan fashion” lies as a fundament for the lack of investment in production and employment, which in turn stagnates the political and social development of the country (Kovačević, 2017: 9).

Political decisions in Bosnia have resulted in declining quality of life, with decreased pensions and increased unemployment contributing to lower living standards, poverty, and a precarious environment that fosters temporary or permanent migration. The motivation for migration has been described as a search for “normality” in both private and work life. Consequences from migration by younger generations has resulted in one peculiar issue: that the result of long-term precarity in Bosnia has transformed into a society mainly consisting of elderly people (Kovačević, 2017: 10). The state of things within Bosnia can thus be described as a vicious circle where the country has been described as a “captive state” unable to purge any of the corruption that figuratively speaking sustain itself on vampirism, draining the life essence of Bosnian society. Kovačević himself describes that Bosnia would require decades of new generations to even achieve any noticeable level of democratisation economically, socially and politically (Kovačević, 2017: 10).

How do politicians and other corrupt groups in countries like Bosnia maintain their hegemonic kleptocratic power structure over citizens? Förslag: Bosnia's political parties maintain their power by preventing any rebellious or radical change through the manipulation of public discourse. They employ nationalist rhetoric, framing issues in a strict 'good versus evil' dualism and attributing all failures to the opposition, resulting in a deadlock. The vicious circle in a society that has been built on fear, hatred, and suspicion, both politically and socially. This stems from a historical backdrop of geopolitical networks founded on vengeful and intolerant political practices, further perpetuating opportunistic and kleptocratic behaviours. (Kovačević, 2017: 12-13).

These practices have seeped deep into the political lives of citizens yet remain ambiguous between true belief in ethno-nationalist politics. It has been documented that the relation between

historical ethnic persecution has aided notions of loyalty to be defined along ethno-nationalist lines (Kurtović, 2011: 244). Yet, loyalty to party politics and adoption of their stances is usually viewed as a form of surrendering of personal ethics, which can be seen as a nihilistic and jaded stance that makes the individual a “corrupted” version of their former self. The negative view on partaking in politics can be seen in a study done on locals in the village Jaice, in which the interlocutors would see dedication to politics as either a fundamental belief in ethno-nationalism or purely motivated by opportunistic gain (Kurtović, 2011: 246). Political membership further divides Bosnia between the people that are members and those who are not, with elderly people occasionally fearing the influence of nationalism on younger generations (Kurtović, ibid). The political divide runs deep to the level that old acquaintances can risk falling out of favour with each other depending on their relation to politics as it is inherently seen as sinister opportunism and will thus define a person's character (Kurtović, 2011: 247).

As Kurtović points out, the lack of opportunities to find a job is one of many factors that has partly caused the mass-migration of younger generations. In turn, mass-migration has led to a widespread hopelessness which has taken root in the country - spreading the popular belief that their own area, or country as a whole, has “no future”, due to the lack of opportunities and brain-drain (Kurtović, 2011: 227. Political organisation in Bosnia is not only morally corrupt but also serves as a pragmatic means to secure one's future. Political parties wield influence by distributing scarce resources through favours, particularly in accessing the job market. In the case of Kurtović’s work, informants seek out to become politically mobilised due to unemployment. In Bosnia, political connections are expected to improve employment prospects, while abstaining from political mobilisation is viewed as a missed opportunity, as those with the right connections may capitalise on job or quality-of-life enhancements. (Kurtović, 2011: 227). Thus politics, no matter how unpopular or scrutinised can still maintain its hegemonic position, as individuals are arguably dependent on the corrupt political parties in the country - furthering the idea of the ‘captive state’ of Bosnia.

As described by Kurtović and Hromadžić, Bosnia due to its ‘captive state’ generally does not cause the populus to actively seek out and mobilise in any politically contrarian movements to the hegemonic powers. They explain that protests and political action are thus few and far between with low attendee numbers. The most notable political upheaval in Bosnia was the 2014

uprising which caused general disorder and vandalism of governmental offices in Tuzla, Sarajevo Zenica and Mostar. The offices were reported and documented to have been stoned, looted and in some cases set ablaze. These protests mostly occurred in the Federation, yet the discontent with national politics had at the time hit its boiling point in both the Federation and in The Republic. The protestors were highly heterogeneous, consisting of impoverished workers, seniors, war veterans, football hooligans, and unemployed youth (Kurtović & Hromadžić, 2017: 263). This indicates that the political situation affects a wide range of social groups within Bosnian society. Kurtović further explains that the root cause of the protests was (unsurprisingly) the growing discontent with political issues within the country linked to incomprehensible high levels of corruption, economic decline and unemployment. The recurring discontent and awareness of the country's situation fuel popular ideas and fantasies of revolt against the so-called “kriminalni sistem” [translation: criminal system] (Kurtović & Hromadžić, 2017: 263-264), which are seen as furthering the precarious living conditions within the country.

2.2 A proud town mouse visits his cousin in the countryside - defining landscapes

As this thesis shifts between researching rural and urban settlements the following definition has been added to the earlier science section to provide a clear definition of what type of settlements are meant to be assumed by ambiguous definitions like ‘rural’ or ‘urban’. Rural areas in Bosnia are defined by what could be seen as a relativley self-sufficient settlement, that usually are somewhat outside the rigid legal structure of urban areas (Wolf, 2010: 102). Settlements classified as rural tend to contain populations who usually are self employed or work in the dominant industry in the town, usually described as a company town. The people living in these rural areas could be seen as semi-agrarian societies as most households rely on domestic production of foodstuffs for consumption and trade.

These products range from homemade honey, dried meats or vegetables to foraged mushrooms and berries. The families then either preserve most of these resources for their own use, trade it for different goods with other local families or sell it, either within the village or along main routes through the country, in hopes that travellers will stop to purchase any goods. In these areas villagers are on much more intimate terms with each other and most families know each other, likewise the exchange of goods is between acquaintances (Simmel, 1976: 12). Life in rural areas can thus be defined similarly to Wolf's description of the re-agiculturalisation of the countryside

due to the fall of Rome; urban crafts have been established in the countryside but have relapsed into agriculture and localised exchange (Wolf, 2010: 103). In the case of Bosnia, the relapse into agriculture and localised exchange has not reached the level of the end of the Roman era, yet the local self sufficiency and localised trade is probably the most distinct characteristic of the rural Bosnian society.

Urban areas, such as Sarajevo, are defined not solely by their buildings and production, but rather by the liberties and opportunities they offer. Liberty in the sense of freedom from the supervision of your local community to the extent found in rural areas. Simmel argues that cities, with their large populations, socialise individuals to become indifferent to others' judgments and to overlook the trivialities and prejudices prevalent in rural societies (Simmel, 1976: 16). As will be discussed further on in the essay, those who seek out Sarajevo do so not to be constrained by the expectations of rural areas. The urban environment can further be explained with its inherent meaning to the interlocutors, rather than predetermined requirements to distinguish rural from urban (Thiessen, 2012: 101).

In her fieldwork on the population of Skopje, Macedonia, Ilká Thiessen explains that the local perception of the urban is not juxtaposed with the rural but with the concept of 'Balkan' (Thiessen, 2012: 101). Being urban for Macedonians means to be modern and mainly to be European, urban in her definition is an expression of identity, more than a specific locality. She continues to explain that being Balkan is more of an expression of values and locality (Thiessen, 2012: 114). The thesis will further illustrate the urban identity through the narratives of informants. Similarly, the motivations of those who have left can be understood in light of the detachment from the values associated with the 'Balkans' upon moving to other parts of Europe.

3. What theories can be used to further investigate the lives of Bosnians?

The theoretical framework for this essay leans into the field of future anthropology and specifically the formation of hope and anticipation in certain socio-historical settings. This form of future anthropology often emphasises situations of uncertainty, with studies frequently delving into fields related to globalisation, economic crises, and long-term conflicts (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 273). In Chapter Two, the discussion of different socio-political themes in contemporary Bosnia and their subsequent consequences, are crucial for fully comprehending the link between contemporary conditions in Bosnia, and how they relate to the field of anthropology of the future which are described here in chapter 3. These material conditions inherently shape the hopes of people and outlooks on their future. This theoretical framework does not focus on the future as it will be, rather it is about the range of visualised constructed futures in the present within a certain culture (Wallman, 1992: 2).

3.1 A little hope, no matter how desperate is never without worth - theories of hope

Furthermore, ‘hope’ and its opposite ‘hopelessness’ have switched positions over time in different contexts. For example, according to Kleist and Jansen the phenomenon has become more noticeable especially within academic literature. One aspect of this new sense of hopelessness stems from the increasing number of alarming reports of crises, exacerbated by the absence of clear political or ideological guidelines and the lack of definitive solutions (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 274). Firstly, notions of crisis typically manifest through framing in public debates, which accentuates societal change. Kleist and Jansen define these themes using frame analysis by Martin Sökefelt, which builds upon the earlier frame analysis established by Erving Goffman.

Their interpretation of Goffman suggests that frame analysis comprises principles of organisation that allow us to define and specify events. Building upon this, Kleist and Jansen further develop Sökefelt's definition, proposing that common frameworks and understandings can be established through the representation of events and conditions (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 274). Upon closer examination, Sökefelt posits that common purposes and social solidarities result in social movements due to the prolonged interaction with elites within a society (Sökefält, 2006: 269).

Social movements are typically characterised and shaped by political opportunities and mobilising structures and practices. Sökefält further elucidates that these movements serve as

both informal and formal 'collective vehicles,' enabling individuals to participate in something larger than themselves through collective action. There are additional arguments that political opportunities often maintain social movements, which makes it possible for social discontent to be voiced against the contextual and structural conditions which inherently are the reason for social movements (Sökefält, 2006: 269).

Kleist and Jansen explain that different phenomena are marked by uncertainty, a characteristic that is often magnified when presented through televised media. Various phenomena elicit different impacts, depending on individuals' perceptions. For instance, the war in Ukraine may not hold the same significance for those outside of Europe. Continuing with the theme of relevance, it is evident that the Pakistan and India dispute may be perceived as less significant and even irrelevant by Europeans with no ties to the region. Similarly, natural disasters occurring in different parts of the world may also be viewed with varying degrees of importance depending on one's geographical location and personal connections.

Regardless of their relevance or magnitude, such phenomena contribute to a pervasive sense of uncertainty among individuals who are directly or indirectly impacted by them. Moreover, the feelings of uncertainty stemming from diverse phenomena can contribute to the perpetuation of vicious cycles that further deteriorate the overall state of certainty (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 275). Inhabitants of a world marked by pervasive uncertainties, rather than experiencing localised uncertainties, may increasingly perceive a general state of crisis.

A potentially more relevant concept of uncertainty for this thesis is the notion that uncertainty is not a novel or exceptional occurrence, as often perceived in the Western world. Instead, uncertainty has become an entrenched and enduring state in many parts of the world (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 275). Likewise, the anxieties about the future and discourse created around it can legitimise present actions based on vision of a future (Wallman, 1992: 16). These categories of anxieties and unpredictabilities acting as mobilising forces, arguably they apply to Bosnia, given the disorder and crisis that has afflicted the country since the early nineties and the subsequent exodus.

Hence, the relevance of framing individuals within different social movements and its influence on public discourse gains relevance, especially given the substantial exodus from Bosnia and

other Balkan countries. To understand how hope and hopelessness impact individuals grappling with the precarious socio-political conditions in Bosnia, one must consider the recurrent 'security crises' of contemporary times, exacerbated by a lack of viable political solutions (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 376). Moreover, existing political initiatives in Bosnia have frequently failed to deliver satisfactory results for the local population, often resulting in disillusionment and further fragmentation within different political groups (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 277). Regions marked by poverty and disappointment tend to lead to a state of permanent hopelessness, and to analyse hope in such a society there lack of hope must also be attributed for (Dalsgaard & Demant Frederiksen, 2013: 53).

The theories mentioned above intersects with the explanations of what actually “creates futures”, allowing anthropologists to potentially observe how futures are created through the everyday life of individuals. As people go on about their daily activities, they are technically creating a specific future (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198). It can be as simple as deciding what you are going to have for dinner or from a plethora of careers choosing a specific one. Alternatively, actions may lead to significant events such as wars or societal restructuring, which represent 'alternative futures' that individuals and societies can bring into existence. The point here is not to be confused with the 19th century ‘great men’ theory, rather that the decisions and actions of untold millions have caused radical changes in human history and life, arguably affecting us today. Bryant and Knight describe that futures are often encountered in novelty, repetition, aspiration, and inertia, imbuing everything from expressions of hope to discussions of discontent, or even mundane daily decisions that shape an individual's life (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198).

The expression of future-building practices - Bosnians is defined through their everyday practices and their perceptions drawing upon the foundational theories of future anthropology that underpin this essay. Especially as several informants have either left, returned or in the process of leaving the country. Having a diversity of locations from where informants are trying to shape their future is important for this thesis. This diversity underscores the indeterminate nature of futures, where actions (such as moving or returning) or non-actions (choosing to stay) define their potential trajectories. Choosing to stay becomes as much of a choice as leaving or returning (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198). The importance of action or non-action in this case means that excluding one of the groups would not give a full insight into what future outlooks

and notions exist for Bosnians. Remaining or leaving can be seen as the anticipation in regards to the future-oriented openness when hope might be fulfilled (Miyasaki, 2004: 70).

The definition of hope in this thesis aligns with Knight and Bryant's conceptualization, which characterises hope as a surge of positive emotions and optimism. Hope pushes and mobilises individuals and groups towards a potentially better future. However, an essential clarification regarding hope is warranted, distinguishing it from the conventional notion of envisioning "something greater" akin to a "dream of the future." Instead, hope emanates from futures characterised by obstacles or unrealized potential, embodying a form of hope amidst constrained or thwarted possibilities. In some cases, hope can be seen as the potential to rectify, enhance, or restore that which has deteriorated. Thus Knight and Bryant define hope as a form of futural momentum, wherein individuals can interface with the future and cultivate circumstances conducive to realising desired potentialities. Hope is neither the current nor the possible, rather a liminal space between the two (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 134).

The informants imagine a better life or a better society beyond their current situation, this conception of hope aligns closely with their engagement with the future as the question ‘what comes next?’ as it entrails hope by its open-ended position as if there is no conclusion, a situation can always become different (Dalsgaard & Demant Fredriksen, 2013: 53). The anticipation for fulfilled hope does motivate human agency to also be in pursuit of futures, through the process of repeating the pursuits of already fulfilled hope, new cycles of future making are generated as the anticipation of hope can once again be fulfilled becomes apparent (Miyazaki, 2004: 106-107).

3.1 Trust thy neighbour, or not?

During the conducted fieldwork, a prevalent theme among my informants and within Bosnian society at large is the pervasive presence of mistrust and distrust. These notions of distrust are commonplace to such an extent it can not be avoided to be discussed when it comes to the challenges and anxieties experienced by most informants. In this thesis, the terms 'mistrust' and 'distrust' will be used interchangeably. Drawing from the insights provided in 'Mistrust - Ethnographic Approximations' edited by Florian Mühlfeld (2018), distrust is understood as the opposite of trust, not in terms of direct opposition, but rather as the cultivation of interpersonal

distance, contrasting with trust's propensity to foster proximity and intimate relations (Mülhfeld et al, 2018: 16).

Expressions of distrust manifest in various forms globally, reflecting a spectrum of societal attitudes. These expressions of distrust are documented as ideas that individuals themselves are separated from structural forms of distrust, this definition characterise individuals as ‘bad apples’, morally corrupt or untrustworthy (Bürge et al, 2018: 111). A prevalent motif often emerges in depictions of unfamiliar individuals or those perceived as potential threats. As per insights from my informants, there exists a nuanced comprehension of the distinction between structural distrust, inherent within societal frameworks, and the internalised or externalised manifestations of distrust observed in interpersonal interactions.

The absence of trust at the interpersonal level is distinguished from the distrust directed towards the state and its institutions. In this essay, distrust towards the state and its institutions is construed as a material condition rooted in prior scholarly discourse. Specifically, the corruption and absence of social security within the country are perceived as outcomes of its historical context and political circumstances. Mistrust for institutions and politics has emerged as a consequence due to tensions between broad public goals and calculated self-interest. The existence of corruption consequently undermines legitimacy of the government and frames it as a kleptocracy which remains as the main source of resistance towards the state (Brand et al, 2018: 94 & Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016: 927-929).

Finally, distrust can create trust, shared scepticism towards external entities serves as a unifying factor. Inside networks, mutual distrust becomes a defining behavioural characteristic, effectively forming what could be described as 'communities of distrust' (Mühlfeld et al, 2018: 19). Acknowledging the presence of trust networks is essential in this thesis as high levels of interpersonal trust between my informants and even strangers has been noted in my fieldwork. It is important to account for strong internal trust within communities often originating from their internalised distrust of outsiders. This dynamic results in communities of distrust emerging as a prevalent social structure among acquaintances. In a sense, mistrust undos the work of trust which is characterised by relations, wealth, effective communication and extensive social ties - mistrust in contrast ruins relations by spreading poverty, confusion and isolation (Carey, 2017: 1)

4. Fields have eyes, woods have ears - methodologies on how to access the field

Various methods have been employed in the creation of this thesis, necessitating improvisations across different areas and environments within the country. Finding interlocutors who are interested in partaking in the study has been plentiful, with more volunteers than could realistically be included in a masters' thesis, especially after receiving an explanation on the scope of the research in question (O'Rielly, 2005: 140). Initially, most interlocutors were individuals associated with cultural centres or community organisations catering to young adults. These key informants played a crucial role in broadening access to a wider network of participants, facilitating engagement with social circles that would otherwise be inaccessible without prior knowledge or approval. This is not because social groups are closed to outsiders, rather that the practical experience from the field indicates that many of the traditional spaces for interaction in Bosnian society do not facilitate interactions with strangers. Therefore, a significant portion of my methodology has circulated around establishing relations with individuals to access social circles which allow for a higher success rate when engaging with strangers.

These key-informants are best described as a form of gatekeepers. Through my interaction with them and the interviews conducted, they would in turn introduce me to others, often emphasising the importance of my world or referring to me as "Bendži je okej - on je naš" [Benji is alright, he is one of ours], indicating that I belong to the community (Göransson, 2019: 67). Through their local knowledge of events and contacts, these key informants have been able to both guide the relevance of my topics and material, as well as assist in finding relevant interlocutors in a field distinguished as highly informal with rapid turnover of people gathering in different social settings (Göransson, 2019: 76).

Once contact has been established with an interlocutor, I proceeded by explaining my research and inquired if they were interested in participating in an interview to share their reflections about their situation and experiences. This approach has yielded significant success, as disgruntled populations often exhibit a strong desire to articulate 'the state of things' and express their frustrations. These frustrations are somewhat repetitive in nature and often return in casual conversations or during interviews, these recollections rarely have a distinction between past and present and are often framed as something that is 'ongoing'. Themes regarding experiences from

being raised during a prolonged time of crisis in an arguably unstable country, are often referring to the past in the present. The link between the present and the past is through the perception that the now is dependent on critical moments in the past. The critical moment results in the interlocutors' narratives to often revert back to the past experiences of themselves, others or historical incidents; making the future unable to break away from the past (Jackson, 2002: 92). Due to the relevance of the past for my interlocutors the use of narrative ethnography has proved to be an invaluable method to decipher the meanings of recurring stories and repetitions of past events to be able to fully grasp how they have shaped the contemporary lives and perceptions of the interlocutors.

Much of the gathered knowledge has been acquired through formal and informal interviews. The unpredictable nature of the fieldwork led to frequent adaptations of scripts and methods, sometimes prompting research inquiries regarding participation, occasionally being asked towards the end of an interview. Due to the unpredictable nature of interviews there has not been any standardised technique for questioning, rather different techniques and questions will elicit different responses from interviewees with a focus on what these responses tell us about the social world being researched (O'Rielly, 2005: 115).

Additionally, tracking different events, interlocutors and community groups has been with the assistance of platforms like Viber or other digital applications, which has been one of the most efficient ways for finding local activities. Establishing physical presence has proved most crucial for integration into these social circles with a large part of my work being done by "hanging around". As my visibility increased, the more inclined new interlocutors were to answer inquiries, resulting in verifying degrees of acquaintance with informants. As my relationships deppended, My access to specific locations and contexts widened by being invited to meetups and events, this in turn increased the amount of informants over time (Göransson, 2019: 75). As the field mostly consisted of private and intimate spheres, snowballing techniques have proved most effective to gain access to already established social circles and contexts for knowledge gathering (Göransson, 2019: 78).

Acquiring material for the thesis itself has been relatively straightforward as Bosnians regularly discuss social and political issues which frustrate them. Offering informants the opportunity to voice their opinions and perception to be documented, seems to be an appealing opportunity for

them to share their experiences of living in Bosnia (O'Rielly, 2005: 140). The willingness of individuals to share experiences significantly facilitates the data gathering methods employed. The spontaneous nature of these types of discussions has led to paraphrasing or recollections of some events are the only form of accessed knowledge. As moments of knowledge gathering have not given any practical opportunity to record the conversations. Due to differences in tools available for knowledge gathering, the writing style in this thesis does include both transcripts of interviews with interlocutors or paraphrasing of their stories. Mixing retellings and transcripts is not due to inconsistency but rather a result of the data gathering process itself.

Depending on the interaction with different informants, a wide range of group interviews has been conducted ranging from semi-structured individual interviews to unstructured interviews. In regards to unstructured interviews they have been performed whenever someone expresses an interest in my work and decides to share their experiences on the spot. Alternatively, if a structured interview has begun but quickly changes course in such a manner that improvisation becomes a more efficient tactic for documenting the lives of interlocutors. Frequently, templates containing general questions may not be applicable to the informants, particularly in instances where individual interviews transition into group interviews. Given the unpredictable nature of some interviews, allowing informants to freely share their experiences while improvising leading questions relevant to the specific situation is often necessary. As there is such a difference in environments and interviews, the type data is highly dependable on the situation which requires adaptability in script, questions and overall in how to gather relevant knowledge about the field (O'Rielly, 2005: 115 & 149).

The opportunity to prepare and commence interviews in a planned and undisturbed fashion has resulted in recordings and transcriptions that have overshadowed the quality of some unstructured interviews. However, it is crucial to consider that certain unstructured and spontaneous interviews have given some of the most detailed material. In these instances, group interviews have greatly contributed to nuanced and intricate topics, as the informants become motivated to share their own interpretations and experiences with each other. These discussions and narrative stories shared among informants have proven invaluable data gathering. On the other hand, one-on-one unstructured and spontaneous interviews are significantly shorter compared to structured single interviews or unstructured group interviews. Nevertheless, the

benefit of spontaneous interviews lies in informant reduced focus on the recorder, which might distract the interlocutor making them overly self aware which might impede story-sharing. Regardless of the interview method employed, the plethora of interviews combined with participant observations has provided insights into the relation between what people claim and what they actually do.It is important to note that interviews are not isolated from the overall material; rather they are intricately intertwined with other data, assisting in research and analysis in broader contexts (Göransson, 2019: 120).

In hindsight, some of the spontaneous interviews have been discarded due to inaccuracies detected during transcription and subsequent verification of the material with the informant in question. Usually this is due to inaccuracies often rendering parts of the interviews unusable. However, over time this issue has diminished as I have refined my fieldwork methods and become more adapted to conducting and retelling interviews. By recording my own recollections directly or shortly after the interviews has contributed greatly to ensure that the data remains as accurate as possible. Additionally, keeping pen and paper for scribbling down key points and later recollecting findings has yielded satisfactory results.

Fully unstructured interviews have been a common occurrence during participatory observations in cultural centres, where young adults willingly share their experiences either individually or in randomly assembled groups of either friends or strangers. These unstructured interviews have been important in understanding collective notions - ideas which might circulate within the perceptions, opinions and experiences of my informants. They aid in verifying whether these notions are commonly held due to exposure to Bosnian society and culture. Additionally, these interviews help identify recurring themes between different people, Shedding light on perspectives which are not necessarily influenced or swayed by the words of close friends or acquaintances. This approach cements the importance of viewing interviews in conjunction to other data sources (Göransson, 2019: 120).

As previously mentioned, most of the fieldwork and participant observation were conducted through cultural centres, primarily to facilitate rapport-building with young adults in social environments. The preference for independent cultural centres and activist groups stamps from their ability to gather diverse groups of individuals. Moreover, they offer access to larger friend groups with a wide range of shared narratives and sentiments regarding their life and

experiences. Especially as regular cafes and bars generally have less opportunities to befriend a new group of people, which have a set intention to communicate with each other rather than others. Participant observations serve as a valuable method for understanding the lives of individuals within the contexts of their own living experiences. This approach extends beyond mere conversations and questions, encompassing observation, active participation, and inquiries into their daily routines and lifestyles (O'Reilly, 2005: 84).

My fieldwork adopts a multi-sited approach not limited to Sarajevo for several reasons. Firstly, multi-sited fieldwork covers the significant number of informants that have either relocated or are in the process of relocating from the country. This approach ensures a more accurate perspective on the prevailing conditions. Focusing solely on Sarajevo would skew the data, centering it around the experiences of living in the capital, which may not reflect the diversity of opportunities and experiences across different regions, including both economic centres and provinces. Secondly, adopting a multi-sited approach aligns with the well-established trends in the world of contemporary ethnographic research, as defined by George Marcus.

Multi-sited ethnographic research has witnessed increasing popularity within academic disciplines over the years, as it is seldom studied in isolation but rather within the broader context of a global system (Marcus, 1995: 98).Some may argue that multi-sited ethnographic research dilutes focus by extending beyond specific localities. However, it can be argued that multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork aids with mapping out terrain of cultural formations, inherently contributing to mapping cultural formations and visualising the intricacies of the world system. This argument is further strengthened by the existence of cultural phenomenons which are not bound to a single site and its local conditions, exerting influence over larger geographical areas (Marcus, 1995: 99).

In relation to my own fieldwork, it can be argued that the theme of this thesis extends beyond the confines of Sarajevo to encompass Bosnia as a whole, with the potential to resonate even further across the broader Balkan region. I have endeavoured to utilise different techniques and understandings of local practices through pre-planned movement within different layers of a broader complex phenomenon (Marcus, 1995: 106). By 'following the people' through different stages of their journey towards achieving their future goals, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of the reflections individuals have within different sites as they contemplate whenever to move

or stay in Bosnia (Marcus, 1995: 106). Following people also includes conducting interviews by phone or video at occasions as some people just do not live there anymore.

The settings in which I often found myself while conducting research would typically take place in the evening, often extending into late hours of night. The reason for these late hours was primarily due to the fact that most informants have a full-time job and generally rarely attend different social events during weekdays. Most informants tended to favour conducting interviews in cafes during weekdays, often accompanied by one or two friends for a casual gathering over coffee or beer. However, typically, individuals depart after one to two hours of socialising to return home. In case there is an event on a weekday [usually Tuesdays or Thursdays] people often leave the event around ten or eleven in the evening.

The sparse social activities taking place on weekdays makes the weekends the ideal time for attending social gatherings in bars that are a crossbreed between bar and café called a “kafana”. Kafanas hold a significant place in Bosnian culture, serving as primary social meeting spots closely intertwined with the Bosnian identity. I assumed an overt role in these settings, ensuring that my interlocutors were aware of my research objectives and intentions. Simultaneously, I fully engaged in participation by integrating myself into their social events, assisting at cultural centres, and ultimately relocating to Bosnia to immerse myself in the daily lives of Bosnians. My aim was to sensitise myself to the world of my interlocutors through firsthand experience and the construction of their social reality (O’Rielly, 2005: 108).

Kafanas serves as gathering spots characterised by a prevalent culture of socialising over beer and rakija [fruit Brandy] , accompanied by copious cigarette smoking. Typically, patrons form clusters with friends, engaging in lively conversations and banter. As the night progresses local pop-songs are played bringing whole kafanas together to singalongs. The songs, often considered local classics from either Bosnia or former Yugoslavia. Kafanska muzika [kafana music] is often considered classics and imbued with relatable lyrics, fostering a sense of collective familiarity and camaraderie and seen as ‘classics known by heart’. Not knowing the lyrics of these songs will cause most interlocutors to react with surprise due to the deep-rooted cultural importance of the kafana and its music. Occasionally, these songs evoke a shared nostalgia for the locale, emphasising themes of a 'relaxed life’ or through sombre lyrics regarding lost love. These social meetups have been invaluable for gathering contact details from locals who are interested in

participating in my fieldwork. There are of course ethical considerations for data gathering within environments where individuals may be under the influence of alcohol, especially when fieldwork necessitates active participation in drinking culture. Balancing the need for immersion with ethical responsibilities is paramount in ensuring the integrity and welfare of both participants and researchers.

4.1 Data where there is no data - Methodological and practical challenges in the field

Several challenges emerged during the fieldwork, warranting careful consideration in both the final analysis and the execution of the fieldwork itself. Notably, a majority of informants in Sarajevo possess some level of academic background, potentially influencing their perceptions of the environment under study. On the other hand, informants from the northern regions of the country predominantly hail from small rural communities where skilled artisanal and craft professions, as well as education, form the backbone of livelihoods. The diversity in backgrounds prompts the question of whether my informants are too different from each other due to the drastic variations in backgrounds, potentially complicating the ability to conduct proper fieldwork with a specific target group.

Dilution may be argued to be a non-issue, due to the clear majority of informants expressing discontent about the country of residence. Their individual lives and their experiences often overlap, particularly concerning negative aspects affecting them, suggesting a degree of uniformity despite the diverse backgrounds of the interlocutors. As mentioned, dilution is defined as a non-issue within the framework of narrative ethnography, as each individual has a unique set of experiences. While each informant has their own unique history, there are still moments which can be considered ‘shared’ due to the similar conditions the interlocutors have lived through considered ‘crystallising experiences’. These experiences are the result of an individual being faced with a question or problem which has shaped their future pursuits in life. In the case of my fieldwork these crystallising experiences are the interlocutors' pursuit for an ‘improved Bosnia’ or a hope to escape their current condition in which they live (McAdams, 2015: 5-6).

Similarly, trying to find a form of ‘normative character’ there is a risk of bias, as researchers may inadvertently select informants who embody stereotypes rather than offering a true reflection of the population in Bosnia. Rather there has been a plethora of people that by majority want to

leave when accounting for different upbringings. The interlocutors still encounter similar or the same challenges in their daily life and their notions do reflect what could be seen as collective experiences. It can also be argued that as the majority of the fieldwork which has taken place in the capital is not representative for the whole country, especially as Bosnia in general is quite a rural country. Documenting both the rural and metropolitan life has been crucial to actually give a full picture of the everyday life of my informants. The experiences of cultural and social restrictions mentioned by my informants in Sarajevo are notably more pronounced in rural areas, whereas they are often regarded as non-issues in rural communities.

Another significant challenge encountered in the field is the lack of social spaces in general, a concern frequently mentioned by the interlocutors. It is hard to perform participant observation when there are few spaces where young adults can interact with each other. This means that my semi-structured interviews have served as the primary source of data, supplementing participation in cultural centres and other social environments when these fields have appeared inaccessible (Bryman, 2016: 493). These methods aided me in remaining open minded to the knowledge documented, letting concepts and theories emerge from the data itself (Bryman, 2016: 11).

Data gathering has predominantly revolved around interviews, with other activities providing additional context and insights. Hence, group interviews and narrative ethnography became quite important tools for collecting solid data on everyday life in the country, especially due to informants' eagerness to engage in discussions about the intricacies of Bosnia and its culture. Challenges in life and discussions about the current state of Bosnia are recurring topics among my informants. Therefore, storytelling, whether recounting personal experiences or sharing second-hand accounts, is a common method used to express frustration and highlight social issues within Bosnian society.

Another reason for the extensive use of interviews in my research is the restricted access to social events, particularly during the late autumn and winter months. Festivals, parks, and other open-air events are generally nonexistent during this time due to prevalent snow, rain, and low temperatures, further necessitating the reliance on interviews for data collection. Furthermore, Sarajevo, situated in a valley with high humidity during the winter, experiences smog due to heavy traffic and coal usage for heating homes. At the time of my fieldwork, it was labelled as

the world's most polluted city (Euronews, 2023), exacerbating the lack of outdoor or public gatherings. This environmental condition may result in different experiences shared by informants compared to other times of the year.

It is important to contextualise that the fieldwork has been hindered by the lack of social spaces, resultign in a contradictory environment characterised by “data where there is no data”. The scarcity of social spaces that facilitate ways of meeting new people are sought after, with participants showing visible enthusiasm and excitement to engage in activities beyond the traditional sense of maintaining closed and intimate social groups through the kafana. In line with what’s mentioned above, it can be claimed that the absence of social spaces for socialising has led to a significant lack in opportunities for engaging with others, resulting in limited data collection opportunities.

The shared motivations among my informants to actively seek opportunities to meet new people, coupled with their vocal frustrations regarding the challenges they face in fostering satisfying social lives, underscore common experiences among young adults. This deepens our understanding of their responses and reflections regarding their goals for the future. Other forms of data include their excitement for meeting new people, their eagerness to exchange details, and active engagement in projects and initiatives aimed at creating social spaces. Common themes emerging from the data include parental control, depletion of social circles, and the perceived lack of investment in the future of youth in Bosnia. These themes will be further explored and analysed in the empirical data and analysis part.

Another noteworthy aspect of the fieldwork is the sense of isolation not within Bosnia itself, but rather in accessing the country. During my fieldwork, there were very few flights directly to Bosnia, often necessitating travel through neighbouring countries and then reaching the final destination by bus. Personally my flights were from Malmö to Belgrade, and then I took the bus from there to Eastern Sarajevo, the bus ride is supposedly six to eight hours long, but can easily take up to ten hours. Delays were typically explained by the driver or regular commuters with phrases like "we will see how it goes." This indicated that factors such as road conditions, weather, or the mood of border police could lead to delays. Such responses were often accompanied by a shrug and a mentality of "it is what it is".

On occasion, I observed significant delays caused by border police who perceive someone on the bus as a foreign tourist. Both I and occasional backpackers were regularly subjected to searches and interrogations regarding our reasons for crossing borders between Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia. When I asked the border police about one of my numerous border searches, their rationale was explained as utilising profiling techniques as valid search methods. According to them, foreigners often bring drugs with them, and they can be identified by tattoos and "non-local fashion," as per their experience. Furthermore, direct flights to Bosnia are lacking and unreliable, primarily due to Sarajevo suffering from unpredictable weather changes. For instance, one of my direct flights from Cologne in December was cancelled abruptly, merely 15 minutes prior to boarding, owing to adverse weather conditions.

The aforementioned hardships, coupled with the considerable energy spent to reach Bosnia and central regions like Sarajevo, often render the journey an arduous task with the risk of unpredictable delays or cancellations further compounds the challenges faced by travellers. These bus rides do have a form of comical spirit and shared experience often leading to passengers making fun of their ‘misery’. Furthermore on long border stops there have been pastries passed around by a generous passenger with the following humorous motivation: “we must have something sweet to eat while waiting anyways” implying that the option would be passive boredom.

As a consequence of these travel experiences, my fieldwork has occasionally been curtailed or delayed when commuting to and from the country. To mitigate such interruptions, I have endeavoured to minimise the frequency of travel to and from Sarajevo, thereby maximising the continuity and efficiency of my fieldwork. These bus rides are also seen as a “rite of passage” and mentioning how you have reached Sarajevo by bus usually results in humorous banter implying that you have gotten “the full Balkan experience” by withstanding the unpredictable nature of buses in the region. Once again, these challenges are expected by regular travellers. The delays significantly impede access to the field, exacerbating the already arduous task of data collection. The seemingly Sisyphean nature of movement further isolates a socially constrained field, not only for me but for informants by limiting practical options for extending beyond the local environment. This isolation presents a significant obstacle, particularly when the local

infrastructure fails to accommodate geographical mobility to meet social needs of local populations.

Collecting the data from rural areas has also been quite a challenge compared to Sarajevo. This is primarily attributed to the intimate nature of rural households. Individuals living in small communities are less keen to engage in topics which give detailed critique or share opinionated viewpoints due to concerns of potential eavesdroppers. On the other hand, multigenerational households are the norm with usually two to three generations living under the same roof in rural communities. This dynamic often complicates the possibilities of conducting interviews undisturbed, as limited privacy and frequent interruptions from family members are commonplace, hindering the facilitation of one-to-one interactions. Not only are they commonplace but older family members often feel the need to voice their own opinion. Of course, elders voicing their opinions is nothing problematic per se, rather it is the high likelihood that disagreements with interlocutors can quickly escalate into an argument.

These arguments often lead to the discussion dying out, or a change of subject. These debates often result with someone losing their patience and shutting down the discussion with the argument, older individuals often downgrade the importance of young voices either by speaking over them or ordering them or shutting down the conversation with belittling remarks. Younger generations employ similar methods by dismissing older people similarly to the Russian stereotype ‘vatnik’, a pejorative term to describe people who are perceived as uncritically patriotic, nationalistic particularly in regards to foreign and domestic policies. Even if there is no specific word for the so-called Bosnian ‘vatniks’, there are similarities between the vatnik stereotype and the oversimplified perception of old people who might display aggression and resistance to liberal or progressive ideas.

Usually topics regarding domestic policies, relevance of religion and homosexuality are common points of contention. It is not uncommon for these arguments to be expressed in a conflict seeking tone which leads to either one side giving in due to exhaustion or frustration for having their opinions and experiences disregarded. Nevertheless, these intergenerational conflicts are significantly disruptive in regards to conducting interviews in rural areas. Inter-generational arguments do not seem to escalate into physical altercations within the family unit, but seem to be a mix of direct, harsh and imprudent language. It is of note that such discussion climates seem

socially acceptable rather than a form of abuse, yet it must be noted that discussions at risk of discussing contradictory worldviews are often sought to be avoided. Younger informants are quick to withdraw from a conversation when elders are around, especially if they notice it might end up in a drawn-out debate due to the hierarchy of the household. Because of the risk of interruptions, writing down key points from the informants afterwards is the most efficient way of data gathering as the length of discussions are often cut short. In regards to informal data gathering, there might be a preconception that recorded material is superior to field notes and might be viewed as after-constructions. On the other hand, it is well documented that the material outside of the recorded formal interview can in some cases be even more important to the fieldwork, due to the fluency of informal conversations between ethnographers, informants and potential third party actors (Göransson, 2019: 123).

The heavy inclusion of informally gathered material partly boils down to the inclusion of narrative ethnography as a method for data gathering. By engaging with informants, not only in formal interviews, but also nurturing an acquaintance with your informants does offer more opportunities for different narratives to surface during conversations. While fieldwork is being conducted, examples of these types of narratives would be spontaneous storytelling and the sharing of opinions which usually are culturally or socially constructed from the informants everyday experiences (Eastmond, 2007: 250-251). Narrative ethnography has thus contributed greatly both to the fluidity and efficiency of my semi-structured interviews as they have been dependent of the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee - which in turn has led to a wider range of discussions and subjects being brought up during my fieldwork (Wästerfors, 2019: 182) by deepening the relations between me and the informant. One of the main reasons for utilising narrative ethnography and storytelling has been due to it has been easier to communicate through creating ethnographic dialogues through a shared intersubjectivity, by muddling the lines between “self” and “other” (Hampshire et al, 2012: 1). Through interactive dialogues the data becomes more of a coproduction of ethnographic knowledge depending on the certain setting and conditions for the communication (Hampshire, 2012: 2).

These settings and conditions are defined as “narrative environments” which mean that you take into account the communicative conditions and resources which surround how a narrative is assembled and received in everyday life where the context which constructs a story is the

narrative environment in question (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 247). For my fieldwork these narrative environments have been invaluable for understanding the lives of my informants, from the young man quickly silenced by an elders interruption, the swallowed tears when loneliness and distance from family and friends caused by migration, to the visual frustration of someone who is absolutely fed up with any imaginable inconvenience experienced in Bosnia. Altogether these environments, acquaintances and interactions between ethnographer, field and informants has achieved much more valuable research than if the data gathering did not include narrative ethnographic methods.

4.2 The thin red line - Limitations on fieldwork and thesis

One limitation of this study is the need to not dwell extensively on demographics and their numbers, due to the previously mentioned last proper consensus in Bosnia being made in 2013, which is safe to assume to be obsolete as the population of Bosnia most likely has continued to migrate since then. Furthermore some individuals are probably still written on addresses used as summer houses by the diaspora and migrant community. Therefore any extensive use of consensus numbers supposed to be "objective and correct" shall be avoided, nor will there be any attempt to speculate on the actual numbers of migration since 2013. The stories of the interlocutors and studies that indicate the prominent discourse of migration in Bosnian culture and society will compensate for the high likelihood of hidden statistics in 2023 and 2024. Pre-2022 data indicates that Bosnia has been the lowest GDP and AIC country in Europe having in academic literature been described as "the poorest country in Europe" until last year, where it was surpassed by Albania (Eurostat, 2023 & Kovačević, 2017: 34). As stated by the International Organisation of Migration, Albania has had the highest rate of migration relative to its population (IOM, 2023), which could support the idea that similar economic situations would lead to migratory patterns, regardless of any actual official numbers of Bosnian migration in the last ten years.

This essay will not focus nor delve on the intricacies of nationalism and nuances in ethnic belonging within the political climate of Bosnia. The reasons for not going deeper into defining the hows and whys of politics are due to being beyond the scope of this essay and better suited for either the field of sociology or politology. Some political rhetorics and its consequences are mentioned and described in how they affect the general well-being of my informants on a micro

level. Politics of Bosnia will be described in how the political system affects the emotional state and sense of security of the interlocutors. Thus this thesis acknowledges the existence of political turmoil in the country but except chapter two there will be scarce explanations to ethnic conflicts and the categorisation of ethnic groups. Another limitation of this thesis is the focus group is between 20-33 years old, this is not due to a disregard of older generations. Older generations have been studied in their relation to younger generations as they are a prominent group in Bosnian society. Analysis of interactions between young and old has been done to source more data, especially through the use of narrative ethnography.

The final limitation for this essay is that individuals which have partaken in quick spontaneous interviews are sparsely described, most detailed descriptions of informants are mainly the ones which have participated in formal interviews. Likewise, over twenty people have been interviewed in different ways, the actual data gathered is far more extensive than what may be used,Due to the last limitation, only interviews with the most consistent data have been used. There are also an even wider range of informants which have approved to be part of the study to be observed but have not participated in interviews. These individuals are mostly friends and acquaintances of informants aware of my role and contributed greatly to data gathering without being interviewed. Anecdotal and solid data gathered around observed individuals will in general not have any extensive data on who they are or their occupation, rather it is their participation in storytelling that contributes to data gathering through narrative ethnography.

4.3 Reflecting over ethical considerations during fieldwork

During my fieldwork I have obviously made many acquaintances, some only as interlocutors, some friends and some both. There is also an aspect that certain people who have assisted me in finding new interlocutors have become newfound friends, giving me access to their acquaintances who are willing to participate. At first glance the overlapping of relations might not seem as an issue but as they overlap, they muddle relations between ethnographer and interlocutor. It is fair to say that outside of formal interviews encounters with interlocutors are usually in private settings, as it seems I am the latest addition to “the crew” so to say.

Most of my informants seem to have a keen interest in my research which I gladly discuss with them. On the other hand maintaining confidentiality of all informants that have taken part without accidentally relieving any sensitive information about someone else is a recurring worry which must be accounted for at all times - to get around the mentioned fine line several different methods have been used to reassure the completion of this thesis with a clean conscience. There are risks that some of the interlocutors who are long-term friends could identify each other on the material in this thesis, due to these few informants already being long-time friends and hiding their identity from each other would more or less be impossible. Instead the conclusion has been made that those informants in particular should be unidentifiable by others outside their own clique, but also that no information they could identify could cause any conflicts or other types of damage to their relations (Göransson, 2019: 49).

The more I get to know some informants there are moments when the conclusion is that the material gathered has not been sufficient and would require more data gathering. Simultaneously we have become friends to a degree where the relation has deepened to a level that it is noticeable that dynamics of interlocutor and ethnographer have been surpassed. In cases where the relation has changed over time, pursuing others for further interviews has seemed more appropriate. In case of these “former” interlocutors, participant observation has not necessarily been interrupted as using material gathered through fluent and natural discussions about their experiences has remained relevant. The participant observation documented with these interlocutors has been done when approval has been given to make notes to use as potential data, while formal interviews have been discarded or just not been scheduled.

All consents has been gathered verbally, either recorded for the interviews done or continuously as pieces of data has been gathered from quick conversations on the topics - the motivation for collecting consents in this way is due to them being equally valid to the written consent and this study has not been suited for written consents (Göransson, 2019: 47). To protect the integrity of the interlocutors in question, either excluding or relying upon vague and ambivalent descriptions regarding very specific details on experiences or topics has been a way to ensure confidentiality of certain interlocutors - followed up by verifying with the interlocutor if the details are censored enough. The motivation for doing so is because the conclusion has been made that interlocutor confidentiality and trust is more important than the few occasions when data is too sensitive to be

described in full. These examples are not many and attempts have been made to rely on data which does not touch on sensitive material in the first place.

There are other aspects that must be regularly considered when being allowed to gather data when conducting participant observation. Due to the ambivalent environments or the specific locations of for example local cultural centres in Sarajevo choosing to speak of these locations sparingly has been preferred. Despite the contributions of these centres to valuable ethnographic data, describing proper names or locations is unwise as they can easily be identified. One of the reasons for the easy identification of locations and interlocutors is due to the impression from my interlocutors that social spaces except the kafana are usually few or non-existent, heightening the risk of identification. Specifying the location(s) in question could easily be used to track down the people in this study. Likewise, being too specific regarding what kafanas some interlocutors frequently visit, could make them easy to trace (Göransson, 2029: 49).

Finally, there are moments when participant observation has been done in kafanas and some of the group members are not officially interlocutors, rather acquaintances or friends to me or other interlocutors, further complicating things. Due to this form of data gathering, it has in essence been impossible to ask people for consent to be studied that have not been considered to be part of the study on any deeper level, in case these individuals are mentioned in the essay they are only referred to by pseudonym. Likewise, for informants that come from small rural communities I have opted for just mentioning that they come from the vicinity of a larger town or city hub, as any more specifications could be used to identify them (Göransson, 2029: 49). The choice to ensure confidentiality, especially for rural communities is due to the prominence of probing and identification done by Bosnians in general, meaning there are regular occurrences of people having never met, being able to identify someone through names of locations, family members, profession and friends.

4.4 Vidi terra novum et caelum, or have I just returned ‘home’?

Upon beginning my fieldwork I have not met the informants beforehand. To be unacquainted with the interlocutors did not provide any significant challenges for establishing relations and gaining their trust. The reasons for quickly becoming a part of the lives of the informants potentially comes from my own roots in Bosnia. My parents both arrived in Sweden as refugees from Bosnia and Croatia at the beginning of the conflict in 1992, while I was born in 1995 as a

part of the Bosnian diaspora community. Compared to many other children of the diaspora my parents taught me to be fluent in BCSM [Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin], with only occasional grammatical hiccups. Furthermore I have a limited understanding of Bosnian sarcasm and pop-culture. Occasionally resulting in teasing and playful mocking, as my restricted understanding is perceived as endearing by the interlocutors.

Being from Bosnia still means I am somewhat subjected to the cultural norms and expectations of my field. Occasionally I am oblivious to my faux pas as I am not raised within the country, which generally is overlooked by younger generations, or lead to chastising by older generations. To be reflective over my role as an anthropologist in my native field, I still have a strong sense of belonging to Bosnia and its people. Since 1999 onwards me and my mother has almost yearly visited Bosnia for two to three months at the time, which results in me being treated as either a local, or as a "diasporac" [local term for someone who has been born and raised outside the country]. Having the status of being partly an insider but also an outsider has its benefits, as it can de-escalate moments of hostility from locals who are looking for a confrontation.

Furthermore, it has been beneficial for distancing myself from strong ethnic labels and being able to gain trust from some of my interviewees, which might harbour ethnic grudges and would be more suspicious of speaking their mind during interviews. I have actively avoided being 'too open' about my ethnic background by avoiding wearing religious symbols, or being ambivalent regarding my family origin to easier traverse the field. Examples of answers would be that I would only say my family comes from "Krajina" [the frontier] or that we are "Krajisnici" [frontiersmen], which is the local definition of people from the subregion known as Bosanska Krajina.

By staying ambiguous with my answers it has thus made it easy to circumvent issues regarding political narratives and historical perceptions which can affect individuals' perception of right and wrong, additionally be used as indicators for drawing boundaries between different ethnicities (Barth, 1969: 15). In my defence, this is not a dishonest practice as it aligns with my own perception that people originating from within the geographical area of Bosnia, first and foremost are Bosnians. Meaning, even if the hegemonic ethnic separatism within the country cares to disagree, I have no intention to draw ethnic boundaries which I consider rooted in radical ethnic nationalism of the civil war.

To include my own positioning and be reflective and transparent is rooted in the theories of "native anthropologists" defined by Kirin Narayan (1993). Native anthropologists use inverted methods for studying other cultures, the native anthropologist must absorb information they already have from earlier exposure to their native environment. When a native anthropologist has gathered their data, they take it out of its everyday context to properly analyse and categorise their material. As has been clarified above, I am a part of the diaspora community and am not fully familiarised to Bosnia as my interlocutors, which solidifies that 'native' anthropologists inherently do not have a full understanding of their own culture. As the anthropologist is not fully aware of all intricacies of their own culture it can still lead to findings that are both strange and familiar (Narayan, 1993: 678).

There are risks with native anthropologists being biassed in their findings as an insider. Simultaneously, being an insider carries significant advantages when gathering in-depth material from their own communities. Interpersonal relationships are often different depending on the given roles and settings, being an anthropologist in a familiar setting effectively changes the relation with the interlocutors. Fieldwork and research inherently changes dynamics and redefines belonging, which in my case has enabled me to remain partly an insider but also an outsider when conducting fieldwork (Narayan, 1993: 682).

5. A country that has no Bosnia is no country at all - Empirical material and analysis

In the following chapters different aspects of gathered data shall be analysed. Some sections of these chapters contain material that stems from varied methods of data gathering. Due to the employment of a wide range of methods, chapters named ‘life stories’ lean heavily on transcripted interview materials, while others are more centred towards analysing participant observations. The final form of data considered are interviews that have been paraphrased, a measure necessitated when the recording of conversations was rendered unfeasible, either at the request of the informant(s) or due to technical deficiencies in the recording apparatus.

5.1 Fear and Loathing in Sarajevo - social environments and the function of social spaces

The spaces frequented by both my informants and additional people primarily include two local cultural centres and kafanas throughout the city. Additionally, several visits were made to offices where certain interlocutors are employed, directly engaging with youth or young adults in roles such as psychotherapy or similar supportive capacities. As explained in section 4,2 methodological challenges underscore the limited options for socialising in Bosnian society. The motivation to frequent cultural centres and events is partly due to other places like kafanas or workplaces being inadequate for expanding social circles. As several of my informants point out, going to a kafana represents a predominant social institution within Bosnian culture for interaction within public spheres.

The kafanas originate from the Ottoman era and carry certain “mythos” and are surrounded by pervasive stereotypes. Kafanas are frequently depicted as venues where individuals seek to mend their heartbreak through the solace of alcohol and music, where fortunes are won or lost in games of gambling, where political adversaries find common ground and forge alliances, or to do business with shadier parts of society behind closed doors. The mythos surrounding the kafana is further reinforced by a music genre known as ‘kafanska muzika’ [kafana music], characterised by lyrics about similar themes as the stereotype/mythos. Regular patrons of kafanas are typically well-acquainted with these songs, within traditional kafanas which embodies said ‘mythos’

impromptu singalongs are not uncommon occurrences as the night continues and the patrons become more intoxicated.

My observations reveal that kafanas are frequently populated from noon onwards, often transitioning from coffee during the day to mainly beer and rakija consumption [or tea and juices for non-drinkers] as the after hours begin around six or seven o'clock. It is incredibly rare that a kafana serves any sort of food, instead drinks are consumed while conversations flow between a friend group where both men and women drink. Further observations indicate that a gathering of acquaintances rarely socialises with other tables or other patrons of the kafana. This tendency is further reinforced as orders are placed from the table, with waiters delivering orders or presenting the bill upon patrons' intention to leave.

Smoking inside a kafana is a prevalent practice, reflective of Bosnia as a nation of smokers, holding the spot of highest tobacco consumption in Europe (Sejfovic, 2023). Despite newly implemented restrictions on smoking in public establishments starting January of 2024, no discernible change in smoking as an integral part of the kafana ritual has been noted during my fieldwork. The importance of mentioning tobacco is seen as how it has a prominent social function among interlocutors. There is absence of designated smoking areas indoors and outdoors that potentially would encourage interaction between strangers. In case there were separation of smokers from their acquaintances there would be a potential for motivating social contact with other smokers, instead smoking is a social activity within a group of acquaintances. Within a thick layer of social life in Bosnia is epitomised by intimate discussions over coffee or alcohol within tightly-knit groups, often with limited engagement with other patrons. This underscores the prevailing mode of social expression within the country.

Despite its inherent cosiness, mythos, and atmosphere, the kafana stand as the de facto single predominant institution for social interaction outside the confines of the household, serving as a quintessential form of social space. Especially during the winter period when festivals or the ability to meet your friends in parks are further restricted by weather conditions. On the other hand, even if the kafana is a social space, my informants often point out that for all its value as a meeting spot for friends it does not offer much possibility to interact and befriend new people. Thus the kafana as a dominant institution does not seem sufficient to provide the means for young adults to establish new relations to expand their social circle. The sole reliance on the

kafana as a social venue may be interpreted as severely limited in terms of options in regards to meeting new people and diversifying social experiences, potentially leading to a sense of monotony. The limited range of social activities appears to influence the perspectives of interlocutors regarding future prospects, constraining their ability to envision expanded social networks and potential friendships, primarily due to the confined social space offered by kafanas (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198).

The reason for explaining the limits of the kafana as a social space stems from the recurring theme of diminished social connections within Bosnia. The people interviewed for this thesis consistently report a notable or a substantial portion of their friend group or family residing abroad, with estimates ranging widely from 30-80% as assessed by the informants themselves. Combined with data indicating the difficulty of forming friendships in Bosnia due to cultural and social constraints on the individuals' ability to freely engage with strangers, there emerges a prevalent sentiment of loneliness or melancholy. This emotional response is compounded by the imminent risk of further acquaintances departing, intensifying feelings of isolation and longing for meaningful social connections. Shared sentiments by the informants, is that most long-term acquaintances are established in their childhood, school/university and professional endeavours. This pattern suggests a restricted range of channels available for cultivating new friendships.

Throughout my fieldwork, trying to access different social spaces have not only provided valuable data, but paradoxically also produced 'data where there is no data'. This concept materialises the information sourced from conversations imbued with themes of general frustration and sadness expressed by my informants, shedding light on the ramifications of dwindling social circles. The few social events which were organised attracted high attendance, partly due to diverging from the usual kafana dynamic. These events provided young adults with platforms for engaging in alternative activities, thus creating more opportunities to forge new friendships.

The motivation to seek alternative social spaces has been notably articulated in group interviews conducted after board game nights. During these sessions, a mixed group of eight young adults mentioned that socialising at cultural events has offered them more opportunities for establishing new friendships compared to the kafana. Moreover, their frustration with the scarcity of social spaces in general was palpable. Engaging in activities diverging from the conventional kafana

norm encompasses a variety of pursuits such as board games, movie nights, attendance at summer festivals and concerts. Notably, while these events may offer the option of alcohol consumption, they predominantly function as non-drinking activities, providing alternative avenues for social interaction. One informant brought attention to a recent legislation prohibiting alcohol consumption in public spaces, accompanied by fines of up to 100 euros. This regulatory measure serves to further restrict the availability of spaces for socialising beyond the established societal norms. Young adults in Bosnia seem to try to create new futures for themselves as the normative practices for socialising is seen as insufficient. By seeking out alternatives to socialise there seems to exist an aspiration and hope to reach past what is offered by the kafana and isolated social groups, these small decisions are often motivated with the seeking potential of new friendships and the disgruntled narrative regarding notions of neglect and abandonment from the government and society as a whole (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198)

5.2 To be or not to be - judgement and cultural expectations on the individual

In the following analysis, there are several recurring themes which seem to be critical challenges or obstructions to the well-being of young adults in Bosnia. The identified main recurring challenges explained by informants are topics of cultural judgements and how they interfere with social mobility within Bosnian society. It must be noted that lacking economic capital which supposedly limits young adults from seeking greener pastures somewhere else is rarely mentioned, in contrast to the claims of previous scientific research in section 2,1. The majority of participants are living what you would call a comfortable life with high incomes for the region, or do not belong to an economically destitute population. Nonetheless, themes of cultural pressures and restrictions remain a common topic unrelated to which social strata the informants belong to. The mentioned lack of social mobility within the cultural expectations are normally additional challenges to an already limited environment, worsening the prospects of young adults with few opportunities for career building or economical independence. Contrary to the established narrative found in most quantitative studies, a comfortable life in Bosnia with a stable income is not beyond reason. Meaning, the economy is not the centre of attention according to most informants, rather it is a small factor. According to my findings, it is a minority of interlocutors who emphasise the low wages in the country as a motivation to leave the country, often when economy is mentioned it is out of empathy for marginalised groups. Groups considered marginalised by the interlocutors are those lacking social welfare networks

and are more likely to be people disabled veterans unable to work, elderly populations with miniscule pensions or people suffering from crippling mental illness not being provided the necessary care.

During my fieldwork, discontent with the current state of Bosnian society and stationary livestyles, are often connected to lacking possibilities for expanding safe and trustworthy social circles. According to the interlocutors, reliable and large trust networks are considered to be a thing of the past, with traces only visible within the social circles of pre-war generations. Indicating, potential correlation between the societal collapse of Yugoslavia and dissolution of social life. The lack of trust networks and options for socialising with new people are seemingly causing dissolution towards notions of community and belonging. Most informants simoutaneously stress that cultural norms and expectations on the individual can quickly lead to bullying or ostracisation from peers, friends or the local community as a whole. Indicative of some sort of social cohesion normative taboos, even if not acknowledged as a social network within local communities.

Reasons for these forms of normative pressure seem to be maintained by attempts to avoid feuds, gossip and outright hostility, ensuring individual expressions and opinions are discouraged from being shared openly. The abovementioned pressure consequently leads to limits in the influence of lifestyles and opinions diverging from traditional norms of Bosnian society, no matter if those ideas are ideas of belonging to a subcultural movement or liberal political stances on LGBT rights. To endorse and speak of such aspects publicly and in private puts the individual at risk from unwanted judgement by others, often described as taking an active stance in harassing individuals which ‘stand out’. As described by Eris, a 29 year-old originally from Vitez, who lives in Sarajevo. During our interview, he claims the lack of diversity in youth culture is prominent even within subcultures. He explains that football hooliganism is probably the only noticeable social group which can be distinctly identified as “different”, while differences are kept discreet. Trust thus seems to become a very exclusive feeling towards another human signified by proximity, usually shown through the ability to speak freely and express yourself without the threat of hostility (Mühlfried et al, 2018: 16). Despite this, mistrust towards others through the cultivation of distance, seems to be expressed through the act of closing off intimate

groups from the outside world. Resulting in viewing the outside world with suspicion and a source of potential danger (ibid.).

Even though Sarajevo is considered to offer more freedom to interlocutors due to offering anonymity by being the largest capital city [Banja Luka being the second capital], it is still considered as ‘the lesser of two evils’ when it comes to social control in rural areas. The interlocutors often describe Bosnia as a country of “traditional” and “rural mentality”, often exemplified through retelling negative experiences of violence or harassment. These experiences often seem to be loaded with a near constant looming threat towards one's integrity, and that anyone could be an assailant. Suspiciousness is often at the centre of these stories towards others, by quick assumptions that strangers or acquaintances alike can be potential intruders in their personal space. Therefore, the rural mentality of Bosnia is often considered to blame for intrusions and is often summed up with the question “či si, od kuda si?” [To whom do you belong, where are you from?], a common phrase asked by everyone, unrelated to your personal relation. These interrogative performances are exemplified during one of my outings to a kafana, where one of my interlocutors was joyfully joking about his home village.

The interlocutor's story came to an abrupt end as a middle-aged man from another table started interrogating him of his origin, family name and specifics about the village. The man seemed to verify if the jokes were coming from a local or should be perceived as an insult. Keep in mind that the man in question had been eavesdropping and the ‘interrogation’ went on for probably twenty minutes or more. Meanwhile, the others’ around our table lowered their voices and strictly engaged in conversations with whoever was closest to them, occasionally listening in and trying to read the situation. Regularly, probing questions on someone's origin seems to be described by the interviewees with a tone of resentment, adding a mocking rural dialect to signal annoyance with the commonality of the question. It appears informants find this question intrusive, because engaging with personal answers to deflect accusations allows the ‘interrogator’ to probe further, only to lead to patronising polemic remarks meant to insult or provoke. When inquired about how my interlocutors feel about experiencing probing questions, they frustratingly answer with annoyance, signalling there might be a lack of anonymity when engaging with others further discouraging them from speaking openly.

Notions of belonging within Bosnian society are strongly linked to locality and relatives, enticing probing questions of one's origin from others. Belonging in the sense of a village, district or lineage seems to have changed within the country. Modernisation and restructuring of cities resulted in changes of ways of belonging, distancing young generations from older generations. Elders are more familiar with environments composed of smaller industrial towns or agricultural

rural areas, often holding those areas in high regard. The demographic split between environments of belonging seems to have created points of contention between young adults and elders. This contention potentially stems from young generations not having the same relation or feelings of localised kinship systems, which they find strange and alien. Young generations are raised in a country where their belonging and experiences are shaped inside post-war Bosnian landscapes, while older generations experience a generalised loss of belonging within the new urban vistas. This generalised loss of belonging stems from the disappearance of specific Yugoslavian city-planning, restructuring of rural Bosnian village landscapes and the cultural shifts it brings (Franklin & Tranter, 2020: 60-61). These young generations are raised in a drastically different world than their parents, they have no personal memory of Yugosslavia, rather they have been raised in its rubbles and thus raised in a world with no set certaintes. Their plans for the future are pragmatic, as for them instability is the only thing certain. This pragmatism causes the state of things to be viewed as nothing that can be challenged and changed, rather it is something impossible to overcome (Demant Frederiksen, 2013: 13). In itself this post-Yugoslav environment becomes incredibly dividing between young and old.

It must be noted that this is not my first time in Sarajevo, even if it is my first fieldwork in the country. Compared to prior visits, while conducting fieldwork there has been a noticeable increase in distinct fashion trends rarely seen beforehand. Styles might include heavy makeup, piercings, intense and/or mixed hair colours and styles which are identifiable with sub-cultures like goth, metal, punk or similar. These changes indicate increased tolerance for different looks and expressions might be on the horizon, even if most interlocutors would disagree. By ‘tolerance’ I mean that pentagrams, military boots with leather jackets or so called “battle vests” from the punk and metal scene seem to be more common than described by my informants. For example, a quick interview with two young women in a kafana regarding how people react to their Gothic fashion choice of heavy makeup and usage of pentagrams. One of them mentioned

she often experiences that especially older generations avoid her by crossing the street, staring or in extreme cases start praying for her “to return to God/allah" due to her pentagram necklace. These strong reactions from the public might change the more exposure Bosnian society has to differences in taste and individual style.

It seems that the freedom to dress and behave according to individual preferences depends on families approving, rather than the freedom to rebel. As described by another interviewee named Angela who is 27 years old and works as a therapist in Sarajevo, her experiences of Bosnian society have been quite positive. Her positive outlooks are grounded in the support and freedom encouraged by her parents, she explains she was taught to take space and express herself rather than to remain a “stereotypical timid woman”. Since childhood she had her parents' approval to get piercings, unique haircuts and dress however she wanted. She continues, her parents supported self expression. She vividly remembers when she was a teenager and her parents were confronted regarding her behaviour and clothes being seen as “inappropriate”. She retells that her parents stood up for her even when called to meetings with the board of education, responding that she is entitled to have piercings and that they are not entitled to expel her from school for looking different. These attempts to restrict the visibility of what is considered ‘abnormal’ is a recurring theme for my interlocutors, in the case of Marko and Lucas who relocated to Belgrade three years ago, recently got married. Lukas is 29, and Marko 27 years old. They left Bosnia together and only returned for short periods of time if there is an absolute necessity to do so. In their case, Bosnian society and family disagreements over their sexuality has created a large divide between Lukas and his parents:

> L: For example, we [Marko and Lukas] just got married and they [Lukas family] requested me to not post any pictures on my private social media profiles. Because someone from my city could see it. Their motivation was that it would be uncomfortable for my family to explain ‘what’ is going on. Of course, I did it anyway, because when it comes to my family I do not care as I am already judged for who I am; so I choose to not care what either my family or their acquaintances would think. So I understand why they would not like to explain things about me, they have no options to leave as they are from the war generation, and have gotten stuck there and of course that is a factor.

It seems like the more open-minded parents are to their children, the wider range of agency was given to my informants. Yet, in the case of Lukas that is not universal. Even if parents protect their children from judgements, like in Angela's did. The parents can be targeted for not ensuring the cultural compliance of their children, pitting the norms of the community against family members. In the above mentioned cases, there is a strong indication how deep the cultural stigmas of Bosnian society really goes as it both divides and unites families.

According to my informants, Bosnia is a country which has regressed into gender and social hierarchies within the family unit, hindering social mobility of the individual. The most common example used by female informants to indicate this phenomena is the increase in femicides, a fact having been widely reported by NGOs working with womens' rights in the country (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2023). Furthermore the de-patriarchisation and modernisation of Bosnian society [and Yugoslavia as a whole], which was prominent during the post 1945 was drastically interrupted by the breakup of Yugoslavia. Due to the fall of the prior socialist system, Bosnia and its neighbours were forced into a previous form of social life and practices which would result in a retradisitionalisation of the family (Košarac & Kurteš, 2021: 3).

The return of so-called retraditionalisation could be interpreted as a result of the 1990s crisis and the subsequent return of ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism, resulting in reinstituting informal social security systems. The return of femicide and a general feeling of social control placed upon my informants could be interpreted more as symptoms. These symptoms indicate that Bosnian society is experiencing a similar pattern to other European post-socialist states, where power and hegemonic values have been concentrated around patriarchal family units, with elders subsequently shaping interpersonal relations (Košarac & Kurteš, 2021: 2). To clarify the role of family value systems, it is important to understand that family does regulate a varying range of individual behaviours like partner and parent-child relations. Meanwhile, political orientations and relations of the individual towards their social surroundings are shaped by values of the family (ibid.). So-called traditional family values are described by my informants to be built on patriarchal value systems, resulting in patriarchal ideas. These ideas constitute husbands to be employed and women to act as housewives.

Women are especially vulnerable in this dichotomy of male and female as women towards the end of 20th century Bosnia as it further limits the options available of women, who are more prone to abandon any career pursuits in order to dedicate their time to child rearing (Košarac & Kurteš, 2021: 6 & 8). Nevertheless, the return of these patriarchal structures further limits the options available for both men and women inside the country, through the social stigmas accompanied with not fulfilling your gender-assigned role.

During a group interview with young adults in their early twenties having gathered in a cultural centre for a board game night, they described the concept of "dok si pod mom krovom" [as long as you are under my roof]. The concept in question, was given as the most common rhetoric used by parents to legitimise their authority over children, which can extend far into adulthood. A young man clarifies: turning eighteen and legally becoming a self-governing adult is somewhat invalidated as long as you are living in the household of your parents. When inquired why they stay so long with their parents the most common reason is due to the lack of available housing for a decent price, the lack of work and/or low wages interfering with the possibility of establishing your own household. It could be interpreted that the household unit and its hierarchical structure seems linked to age and contribution to the household.

If these suspicions are correct it could mean that the child/children, who reach adulthood remain in a liminal stage in the eyes of the parents due to the dependence on informal social security systems. To achieve adulthood and be viewed as of equal status is through the lens of natalist perspectives, viewing procreation and continuing the family unit as almost mandatory. The over-reliance on the family unit as a form of social welfare, as a result of Bosnia having a strong informal social security regime, substituting a functioning welfare state. Informal social security regimes are defined by institutional arrangements, where people are heavily relying on their community and family relationships to meet security needs. These relationships are often hierarchical and asymmetrical, which in the case of Bosnia could be seen as a potential reason for young adults both feeling restricted in choosing their own future. Based on earlier research the short-term security offered by such arrangements are traded for long-term vulnerability and dependence (Wood & Gough, 2006: 1699).

In relation to aspects mentioned in the previous section of the hierarchies in Bosnian family units. Rigid control from the family does interfere with the interest and goals of many young

adults in Bosnian society. A discussion topic within the group of interviewees from the game night was that their parents' monitoring, and incentive for controlling their children's behaviour is a point of frustration and conflict. In said interview, a young man mentions that one of the few meeting spots for making new acquaintances and engaging with hobbies is a local skate park. He explains, extending past skating, as the park gives a rare opportunity to make new friends intergenerationally.

The skate park in his meaning, functions as a safe space where social life can develop and widen. Meanwhile, the park has a stigmatised reputation in the eyes of his parents. He describes that skating as an activity is seen through the lens of loitering and as a form of ‘dangerous’ youth culture, which leads to disapproval and occasional confrontations with his parents. Their reasoning is that skating puts their son at risk of becoming an alcoholic or drug user. He continues, their fear stem from a small cluster of local drug users that tend to

that sit at the far-end of the park, having in his words found a quiet spot to engage in their own indulgences. Even if these users avoid engaging with the skaters, the physical existence of the users in their vicinity made his parents conclude that their son is partaking in high-risk environments. Skating to them has thus been perceived as a threat to their son's ability to pursue an education, job and to maintain a reputable standing in society and marry in the future.

In the group interview with seven different young adults, the others shared similar stories of their parents actively delaying their children from leaving the household when they have set plans to meet their friends. Typically, parents want to know who and where their children will go and have set expectations on when they will return home, to keep track of the habits and outings of their children. According to the interviewees they do not have any real hierarchical standing towards their elders, meaning to remain obedient becomes preferable to avoid arguments or conflicts. In the group interview the ages of the young adults vary between 22-28 years and that they feel a wide range of emotions varying from frustration, annoyance and exhaustion from these perceived controlling strategies. These strategies are often referred to as a lacking interest in understanding the lives of younger generations, misaligning with the interests of the young.

A woman in the group interview explained that one of the few ways to achieve a form of autonomy from their parents is to move out. For her, getting married and starting your own

family is the only way to be recognised as an adult. She explains that living with your parents until your late twenties or early thirties is common in Bosnia. While living with your family, obedience and parental authority is further strengthened by the supervision of extended family, which seems to be at odds with the young adults perception as fully grown adults with their own agency.

Settling down becomes a rite of passage for young adults, who retain a liminal status until being viewed as self-sufficient, to be seen as a fully grown adult. In theory, liminality is described as three stages: separation, margin and aggregation - the first phase is a symbolic behaviour which signifies detachment from a set social structure or cultural cultural conditions. During the second liminal stage the individual has an ambiguous standing with few attributes to the previous and future state, resulting in being in between childhood and adulthood. In this context, they are expected to remain an obedient child being raised by their parents, until becoming a parent themselves with their own household. Liminal states would thus be applied to adults living with their parents, restricting their ability to gain the status of an autonomous adult. The third and final state is settling down and having your own household and partner with either children on the way or already born. Only in the final stage does it seem that the young adult is able to fully indicate that they have achieved to meet the requirements within the cultural perception of what classifies as an adult (Turner, 1969: 359).

To finalise, it is hard to make a final conclusion on what truly is the exact reason for the parental control over their children, extending far into adulthood. To fully flesh out this hypothesis would potentionally require studying adults and their children through the process of achieving independent status within the household for a prolonged period of time. The conclusion above is an hermeneutic interpretation of the perception of my informants. In their eyes it seems the family unit interplays with factors of social, political instability and diminishing social circles as an additional challenge. These challenges can potentially hinder young adults ability to create a comfort and life of their own in a society which already places extensive challenges on the individual.

5.3 Rural life and metropolitan areas

Regarding rural areas, fieldwork has been done while participating in Orthodox Christmas around the town Gradiška, which lies in the northern parts of Bosnia, mainly informal interviews

with several young adults have been performed in this region. In northern Bosnia economical aspects are mainly mentioned as the reason to leave the country. Most people in the provincial border area next to Croatia claim their largest migratory goal is to find employment in Austria, due to it being the closest location offering prospects to work and live comfortably. When visiting a rural village, one of my informants mentioned the prewar population was around 8500 residents with a majority of Serbs and Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians living there as minorities. According to the resident the current population has fallen to around a thousand which are by majority Serbs, with speculations on being between 800-1500 when asking different locals. In the village, opportunities are scarce with few options for employment except low-wage jobs in the local woodcutting industry. It could be argued that the youth of Bosnia in rural areas are more neglected than in Sarajevo due to lesser prospects.

To paraphrase a local villager, named Boško, he is soon to be twenty years old who recently completed his craftsman education as a welder, yet feels his precarious situation has barely improved. Boško explains that work in the village does not ensure stability as it is a common occurrence for workers to have their wages withheld by local industries. During a barbeque he frustratingly exclaims “I can wake up tomorrow and go to work to be told I have been fired or made redundant without warning”. When inquiring on how it impacts his life, he replied that due to the precarious situation he will never be able to ensure a secure employment and economic stability to provide for a family. Thus Boško hopes to migrate to the EU to ensure a future for himself, and reach the potential to be a suitable man to marry and have children with.

The Republic being in general poorer than the Federation, it seems like the economical aspects are more relevant to the locals compared to Sarajevo. During my interview with Boško, an older man interrupts and states “the beer we drink, our cigarettes, fuel and the food we eat is *all* money - it is easy for the rich to say life is not about money when they have it!” Boško agrees with the statement, seeming to reinforce his belief in the destitution of the region. It can be interpreted that for the rural regions of Bosnia, the young adults who are unable to relocate or find a secure employment suffer from being ‘confined in time’, plagued with chronic tiredness from abject foreboding - their daily life is defined by monotony and exhaustion rather than the energy of opportunity. In the village areas around Gradiška, life seems to be defined by stuckness and hopelessness (Jefferson et al, 2019: 10). Hope lies elsewhere, in the West, as hope can be seen as

a by-product of something that has already degraded or failed, in the context of Bosnia hopelessness thus seems to symbolise home (Knight & Bryant, 2019: 134).

Even if the economy is the centre for discontent in and around Gradiška, the same lack of social spaces, cultural restrictions and expectations are to be found as in Sarajevo. It does seem like the younger generations in Gradiška are less prone to questioning or finding cultural restrictions as a root cause of their issues. For example, there is a lot of distrust, and regular discussions that everyone is "pokvareni narod/ljudi" which roughly translates to 'mean-spirited individuals'. Often when asked to describe these types of people they often bring up jealousy for others' success. These people are supposedly prone to express schadenfreude at others' failures in life. Another explanation includes prying and judging looks and that gossip spreads like wildfire, in case you are seen acting in a way which is seen as inappropriate.

There seems to be a deep rooted distrust towards younger generations who have internalised ideas to 'watch out' for these mean-spirited people which might pose potential dangers. In addition, vigilance must be maintained in case someone "says the wrong thing" or behaves in a certain way which is not seen as normative acceptable. It seems these notions of distrust stem from the missing of trust, as described by Michael Bürge; assignment of responsibilities for failures and disappointments can be internalised and externalised and are not necessarily ascribed to structural problems. Even if the informants in the rural areas are well aware of the structural issues of the country, the recurrence of themes regarding these "mean-spirited individuals" which spread jealousy and bullying seems to be a by-product of missing trust. Missing trust can cause certain states of mind affecting individuals in different ways, seemingly reflecting a similar condition found in Sierra Leone where the locals speak of "bad hearts", "spoilt hearts" and "warm hearts" (Bürge et al, 2018: 111).

In Bosnia, suspicion towards others for expressing negative behaviours like schadenfreude, bullying and jealousy becomes synonymous with viewing the population as a whole as "pokvareni narod/ljudi" [corrupt people]. It can be further speculated that these forms of prying and surveillance comes from Bosnia's socialist history, and are the remnants of social levelling techniques which have had a wider social function. Social levelling techniques have been documented to be social mechanisms for the Bemba villages in Northern Zambia. In between the Bemba, there are established social ethics that those who have, shall share with those who do

not, and in case someone does not share it leads to critique of the individual and threats of sorcery. These pressures are meant to hinder individual accumulation of resources, leading to centralised control in said individual. In addition, the Bemba employ this social levelling technique to avoid causing changees of the village (Kakeya et al, 2006: 31).

The speculation of social levelling techniques in Bosnia come from the common trope of suspecting the origins of someone's wealth. If someone has achieved noticeable economic success either during wartime or in the post-war period, it is often questioned with “otkud ti toliko para?” [From where have you acquired so much money?]. The question in itself is highly antagonistic in its nature, as it is an accusation of war profiteering or theft. Of course, it is well documented that looting, war profiteering and racketeering during wartime and post-war times were rampant. Yet it does not explain high levels of bullying, jealousy and schadenfreude related to wealth today. The hermeneutic analysis becomes that said social levelling technique is a remnant of socialist mentalities in a post-socialist environment. More specifically the phenomena of udarniks [shock workers] and youth workers actions. The phenomena of worker actions are documented in Yugoslavia as a form of voluntary physical work for building and expanding infrastructure after the Second World War until the late eighties. Worker actions were both considered as a form of collective responsibility and moral obligation, worker actions thus functioned as an institution of edification in instilling shared morals. The principles of shock work were rooted in the principles of self-sacrifice as part of a gift economy; of giving, accepting and finally reciprocating the received gift (Matošević, 2016: 70 & 77). To finalise, hostilities towards individual success, and distrust towards the potentiality of others ‘sabotaging’ your improved living conditions. These hostilities might be the remnants from an obsolete gift economy in a neoliberal society, where success is highly individualistic rather than collective.

In general distrust is explained by one of my informants named Đorđe, who recently has been convicted on allegedly false grounds. According to Đorđe, he has been framed by a group of friends who informed the police that they were allegedly allowed to consume some illegal substance on his property. His motivation for why they betrayed his trust is jealousy, as he has a successful business focusing on creative art, rather than a normative form of income and that he is happily married. When pressed on why they suddenly decided to choose the above mentioned course of action Đorđe states that their betrayal comes from this “mean spirited enjoyment” to

see others' people fail in life. His conclusion is not unique though as speculations on the mean spirit of others are common topics, further reinforcing ideas that trust in others is what brings hardships upon the individual. In the case of Đorđe, the incident motivates him to remain suspicious towards others.

In general, the people I have interviewed in the provincial environment seem to experience the same judging cultural expectations. Regularly, there are discussions on why homosexuals are allowed to get married in churches, or why pride parades should not be allowed. Women are questioned and discussed for dressing provocatively, or are seen as unfit for marriage in case they have a bad reputation. Furthermore marriage and having children are still held in high regard even by the youth which is more often than not the result of requests by their elders.

When discussing these matters most young and even older populations insist that they are not judging or restricting others from living their life to their own. The blame is shifted to being a question of decency, or in regards to homosexuals, of conflicting with their own interpretation of religious philosophy, and thus 'sinful'. This is done to not incriminate themselves as mean-spirited individuals, which they consider being the bane of their own freedom. When asked about the mentioned topic, often the explanation is that they want to live in peace and 'undisturbed', the alleged intrusion in their life.

It is an important note that the word "nepovjerno" in the South-Slavic language group Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian roughly means "untrustworthy". More accurately, nepovjerno means having a lack of faith in something, which can refer to not believing the state "ne vjerujem drzavi" [I do not believe in the state], or "taj lik je neprovjerena osoba" [That guy is an untrustworthy individual]. Consistently when engaging with my informants they imply nepovjerno can be uncertain, for example job security or reliable social protection [or rather the lack thereof]. In addition, it is also defined as the deep rooted knowledge and certainty that social institutions like religious, nationalistic or political initiatives are not to be trusted due to corruption, and the negative consequences thereof. Trust becomes signified by proximity and mistrust is signified by the cultivation distance (Mühlfried et al: 16).

Based on my research, trust is often put in the well-established family and long-term friendships which form networks of trust and distrust for the outer world (Mühlfried et al, 2018: 17). It is

worth noting that it does not seem that suspicion is as deeply rooted as mistrust in general, at least on an individual basis. While suspicion is defined as the active resistance to trust often directed towards the state (Mühfried (ed) & et al, 2018: 94). My informants have been noted to seek new friendships through cultural centres and whenever the opportunity arises they do share their guarded opinions. Similarly, treating others to drinks or any other expense is rarely seen as something noteworthy and a 'thank you' is often lightly disregarded in a manner as it is obvious that you should be treated, implying thanks carries little to no worth of mention. Furthermore, new acquaintances are quickly offered to join in at tables and it does not take much for people to open up. It does seem that the distrust for others comes from another root cause than that young Bosnians actively surveil each other when intimacy has been established, nor does it seem to exist any suspicion if it is uncalled for.

The above and following tangent might seem contradictory to the overall implication that there is deep rooted mistrust in Bosnian society. It is of note, that existing mistrust seems to encourage deeper trust in those relationships the individuals have established. As interlocutors long for wider networks of trust, due to the lack thereof. It can be argued that Joy Hendry's interpretation of Sahlins generalised reciprocity, as a form of expression of social relations where no definite obligation to return is expected; seems to be commonly used between tight-knit cliques in Bosnia (Hendry, 2016: 68). The phenomena of generalised reciprocity is quickly noticed if someone needs to leave early from the kafana as they are rarely expected to pay their part, or you notice they have discreetly left a bill on the table by the end of the night. Sharing bills are a regular occurrence as bills might run high for large groups. These bills are usually shared to not burden one single person, yet the general notion of splitting bills is still loaded with awkwardness. Additionally, bills are often split unequally, as cliques of friends are eager to treat each other with the loose promise ' you will get the next one instead'. Upon the next bill, there will once again be a point of discussion when the same person(s) once again insists on taking on the majority of the bill. The generalised reciprocity is one of many ways it can be assumed that Bosnians signal solidarity and intimacy, as it stands contradictory to the regular discussion to be 'on guard' of freeloaders. It could be assumed that high levels of distrust are found in Bosnian society, but are characterised by constant acts of trust and generosity. Trust has not disappeared, rather it has been translocated into intimate trust networks, while mistrusts have become redirected towards

strangers. The system of shared distrust seems to result in an increase of trust and solidarity within the group (Mühlfried, 2018: 19).

5.4 Damned if you do, damned if you do not - Conformity and cultural expectations

Noticeable aspects of Bosnian society is that social restrictions cause people to hide in plain sight, which was noticed during one of my outings for fieldwork. I had been invited to a pride event in a bar which for all interpretations available could be seen as a usual meetup for the LGBTQ+ community. By 'usual' I refer to drinking, singing and that the participants seemed comfortable to either dress or express themselves in non-gender normative manners. The event was arranged in a kafana which leaned more to being designed as a bar usually located in the Western hemisphere, the interior had less seating for cliques of friend groups, with an interior design that did not reflect a traditional kafana, but rather a modern interpretation of Art Deco. Additionally, the bar had a well-stocked bar with more foreign options like Laphroaig Scotch whiskey and El Dorado rum, which are rarely encountered in Bosnia.

The event was a karaoke night attracting quite a large crowd from the whole country to attend the event. Here is the crux of the matter, even if the event itself seemed ordinary on the inside, the organisers had taken precautionary measures by supervising who wanted to enter and making sure the inside remains hidden from the public. Even if the legality of such an event is not questioned, it must remain hidden as a precautionary measure.

Some of the organisers, which are a part of a local LGBT+ group, also participate in arranging pride in Sarajevo, were very attentive when it came to making sure the event was not noticed by the outside. In case outsiders would attempt to intrude and potentially sabotage the event in some way. Quickly after my arrival during the preparations, a group of men looking for a drink were told to leave with the explanation that it was a private event. Later on, all windows and entrances were covered up before any pride flags were placed in visible spots to further avoid potential perturbations noticing the event. Finally, the organisers rotated guard duties by the door, to make sure no unallowed entrances were made and potential intrusions.

These fears and precautions are not isolated to the organisers, rather it is a fear which has been voiced by informants alike. During an interview with an informant named Zana who is a twenty year old sociology student, she voiced her regret at not partaking in the fourth pride parade

arranged in Sarajevo. When inquired about not joining the parade Zana explains that she did not participate out of fear of someone “ da uzme pištolj i da nas pobije” [to take a pistol and murder us] or other potential forms of danger. An important consideration is that none of my informants have actually mentioned experiencing any form of physical assault during interviews. Usually it is explained that “people just say they will]hurt/kill someone] but in the end it is only talk”, yet it is a fear that most informants carry or atleast have a certain vigilance for not being targeted for different reasons.

Their fear is arguably not unfounded, although assaults are not brought up during interviews, stories of police brutality or physical assaults tend to surface in the kafana within informal settings. It is also important to note, during my fieldwork there had been news reports that a driver had stopped another vehicle and supposedly shot and killed a passenger without provocation. The murder was widely talked about in Sarajevo, but was generally viewed as a ‘common occurrence’, acting as a confirmation bias for the interlocutors to prepare for such incidents to potentially occur to them. Fear in itself is linked to distrust through the destabilisation of social relations by creating distrust between intimate relations, acquaintances and strangers alike - thus fear breeds suspicion and apprehension within societies (Carey, 2017: 1).

Fear has further been described as being linked to ambiguities, denunciations, gossip and in the case of Bosnia murders, creating suspicion towards the unknown stranger. It can be speculated that the spectacle of torture and death can be inscribed on individual bodies and the collective imagination through a constant fear of threat (Green, 2019: 118-119). Notions of potential looming threats have potentially moulded the way Bosnians reflect on assessing potential dangers around them, further limiting the sense of security and vocalness on sensitive topics. In a perceived hostile society opinions, sexuality and interests can potentially quickly lead to the fear of your own life. In Bosnia these fears are reinforced by a very real history of violence, and the risk of continuous violence. Thus young Bosnians seem unable to either feel security or freedom due to real dangers within society but also potential imagined dangers within themselves.

In a way, it can be argued that Bosnians' fears, suspicion and distrust partly stems from a “mycoptic gaze”, in the way that their fears feed into the uncertainty and distrust of individuals. Zachary Whyte (2011) described the mycopticon as another form of the panopticon, the

panopticon being explained by Focault as a form of total surveillance. On the other hand, the mycopticon relies on a near-sighted system of partial surveillance practices, where individuals are unable to distinguish when they are being watched or not. Furthermore, the mycopticon utilises uncertainty rather than directly applied discipline. In the case of Whyte and Foucault the mycopticon or the panopticon is usually implemented by institutions and bureaucracies (Whyte, 2011: 1-2). For Bosnians there seems to exist a cultural/social mycopticon, which makes public spaces or even friend groups and acquaintances a form of threat to your individual integrity. In itself, it could be the result of a bigger picture of distrust towards society and others. Through traditional cultural expectations, the individual fears expressing opinions or showing lifestyle choices, considered provocative or be carried through gossip by eavesdroppers. Vigilance towards avoiding being targeted, overheard or criticised is a common technique employed both by younger and older. Further vigilance is ensured through warnings to others to 'watch your tongue' or not dress 'provocatively', in itself it could be described as walking up a set of wooden stairs, trying to not cause creaking to wake up the others in a household. These actions of carefully expressing yourself are described in detail during an interview with Selma, a 27 year old woman from Sarajevo. Selma shared some of her experiences of living in Portugal and her current experiences living in the Czech Republic, stating that the worry that someone is watching or will confront you over 'inappropriate' behaviour or opinions seem far more prominent in Bosnia.

> S: For example, I had a situation with my friend. We used to go out all the time together in Sarajevo. I was working in a hostel at the time and we were socialising with people who were travelling at the time of different origins around the world. But whenever we went out to town their first impression [of the travellers] would be "why are people only standing around?" and we decided to dance just like we did in Portugal. At one point a girl had recorded us, which we figured out through acquaintances that this girl had posted her recording on Instagram as a story and had added the comment "gdje svijet ide?" [What is becoming of this world?]. That was in Sarajevo while in Portugal whenever I went out I felt much more relaxed and without the fear of being scrutinised by bystanders.

B: Yes, the feeling of being more relaxed - could you specify what that feeling of freedom/relaxation was?

S: Yes, I think it was the first time I was away from my own house and the reach of my family, which on an individual level gave me the possibility to explore my identity in new ways. On the other hand, through the discussion with others, even if I am generalising - Brazillians and Portuguese people which I surrounded myself with, would not give me judgmental comments which could be expected in Sarajevo. Especially in regards to discussion on LGBTQ and womens' rights - I do not know, in general, themes which I find interesting I just would not have the possibility to discuss or explore in Sarajevo.

B: I see, but what would be the reaction if you would speak about these themes and what would happen?

S: Well, to start with, since 2014 I have become more confident and talk about these themes with my friends and people I know are open minded. But when I meet people who are not that open minded, I am very careful how to approach any discussion with them. I am easily triggered by people who are unable to discuss these themes. I feel I would need to expend a lot of energy explaining and invest a big part of myself in conversations which are not open minded. Furthermore, I would require to have the right mindset to have such a discussion as it is emotionally draining, sure discussing things where people disagree is different. Here [Bosnia]. it is more like a barrier to breakthrough for communication, which was the biggest issue for me.

B: So what would these general notions be in Bosnia then?

S: In my opinion - very conservative. It depends on your local area, in Sarajevo there are more options for speaking more openly about my opinions. But the rest of Bosnia is very taboo to do so. People will be quick to stare at you and confront you on "sta si rekao/rekla!?" [What did you just say!?].

B: What happens when you do not follow the expectations of society or your local area or likewise?

S: In my case, you become judged in Sarajevo, if I did not do something, well - If my plan for my life is not according to the social expectations of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like you do not get a bachelors', masters', full-time job, a husband and get married down the line. That is incredibly important and the high pressure I have felt from my family and local acquaintances. It's all certain milestones which I must complete and alternatives are not existent. All that diverges from that expectation, will make you look like a failure and it will impact your quality of life. It becomes rooted in your own internal perception of your self worth. I myself have been traumatised by it and it took me a long time to realise why I feel like that. And to start realising how I myself am free to arrange my life. To realise that it is not the end of the world and that you are free to live however you like, and you are able to be happy and successful in a million different ways other than the expectations placed upon you.

B: So what options are you given then and which ones are restricted?

S: Compared to Portugal, Czech Republic and foreigners I have met, how tied we are to each other (Bosnians that is), how we fight and struggle for our wellbeing and that we in some way resemble more of a pack. We go like a pack through life and resolve our issues as family and friends, you do not really have your own responsibility or expectation to take initiative yourself according to your gut feeling - it must always be verified with others. Maybe it is individual, but yet it seems others outside of Bosnia first consider things for themselves and then ask others, Maybe it has something to do with the war, to survive you need to be in a pack and to cooperate. It is a blessing and a curse, I miss it a lot but often enough it is not good for me [mentally]. But it does also restrict your ability to believe in your own actions and your own gut feeling, when you want to make changes in your life.

It could be interpreted that the experiences of the LGBT+ community in this case are not unique, rather an extreme version of the already prominent jugement and surveillance found in the country at large. The preventive measures taken by Bosnians and their warnings ushered in to avoid conflicts. Due to the expected hostile outcomes of voicing opinions or acting out of line are deeply rooted in the dependency on informal security regimes. Informal security regimes are often dependent on family and friends, which reinforces constant fear of repercussions from

society as a whole (Green, 2019: 118-119 & Wood & Gough, 2006: 1669). It seems the proactive precautions taken to avoid these risks and confrontations, further contributes to the notion of high levels of uncertainty and insecurity for many young adults. For my informants and potentially for a large part of the young population. The aspect of feeling secure enough to voice critique and self expression is something they find lacking, and Bosnia has been unable to accommodate their wanted needs, on both a cultural and structural level.

5.5 The uncertain future of Bosnia: anxiety, hopelessness and apathy towards society - life stories analysed

To contextualise the notion of Bosnian apathy, this thesis indicates that there is a link between fear and apathy for young Bosnians. In general it is most noticeable in how informants view and reflect over past, current and future political turmoil. The general consensus between my interlocutors mentioned that the war [Bosnian civil war 1992-1995] never ended. It is not claimed in a way of ethno-nationalist sentiment, rather it is the prospect of war and future turmoil which interferes with the future-planning of the informants. A recurring theme mentioned by my informants is that fear and distress mainly comes from political rhetoric within the country. Not a single informant expressed positive standpoints on Bosnian politics, rather it is viewed with spite and significant distrust, due to political backsliding into threats of militarisation.

It is described that the media in the country often spreads fear and worry of a potential future war between the Federation and the Republic, and that it is often enough done with inflammatory antagonisms between the three different ethnicities. Interlocutors feel constrained with little to no agency left to the individual for any significant change in Bosnian society. Bosnian society thus seems to be highly structured around militarism and militarisation. Militarised imagery in popular culture, stockpiling and mobilisation are commonly mentioned as anxieties by the interlocutors. Furthermore, militarised societies keep past wars in the public memory through recollection and the planning of future [potential] wars. The public discourse is riddled with leading discourses on the topic of war, even if the country is supposed to be at peace (Gonzáles & Gusterson, 2019: 6). The interference of militarism in the daily lives of young Bosnians is described by Edin, a 28 year old part-time translator and student from Sarajevo, currently living

in Geneva since 2022. The following transcription is from his views on the influence of Bosnian politics and global conflicts on everyday life in the country.

B: Do you feel that you can influence?

E: Bosnian society in my opinion is somewhat, as we discussed earlier in a global periphery - we are gravitating towards other more central influences. At least in our context, in a way it generally has resulted in a separated society and there is no cohesion, not cohesion in a national way, rather I feel there are many narratives which are antagonistic in a way.

B: How do you mean antagonistic?

E: Well, if we see what is pushed upon us by the media and if we look at Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian media. It is filled with narratives which are very aggressive towards each other, and it makes me feel the war never ended and that it is a perpetually frozen state. And it's very hard to break free from it.

B: But is it only noticeable in politics or in everyday life between people?

E: In a way I feel it is more noticeable on a macro perspective, but on a micro level I am not sure how tangible it is - in my friend group and experience around Bosnia there is not a lot of rhetoric on what I have mentioned (the ethno-nationalist one). In a way I think people concretely are less preoccupied with that antagonism between each other. But why it is like that - if that would change over time I do not know. I think about it a lot and I do not think a status quo will remain in the long run, but the situation as it is will remain for a while more.

B: If there is a political aspect - how does foreign conflicts like Ukraine and Kosovo affect the feeling of security in Bosnia?

E: It affects us a lot, in a way - those critical moments when something happens is very intrusive [on the feeling of stability]. Like, when the war in Ukraine happened.

B: Like, that the Republic wants to break away?

E: Yes, I feel immediately - if I look at my own family and closer circle of friends I feel a type of fear in every aspect, trauma which seeps into different aspects of life.

B: In what way?

E: When I look at my family, for example my grandmother - she always buys flour in large quantities as there might be a war here. It is always seen from the aspect "over there something has happened, so it will boil over here too". I see that in people in a way when I see it in the media and what is being mentioned there in the public eye - it is visible in people too who are not a part of my social circle. It is not exactly the same but you can feel the panic and you can sense a type of movement and something is being disturbed. If that is only a reaction to global politics which seep into our politics and the position of our social institutions - maybe they see a potential to disturb what we already have established (the Federation and the Republic). Something is disabling it.

B: So what is your reaction to it then? Continue as normal or any reaction to it?

E: Well, for me I do not have that panic reaction as it happens regularly but it depends from person to person - it happens all the time, people start talking which makes fear and uncertainty return. But in the end you get tired of it, I only have a certain capacity to deal with it so I do not think anything will happen in the way of our security.

It is a recurring theme in conversations between Bosnians to speak of their experiences from the war, but to a lesser extent by younger generations. Individuals born between 1990-2000 often fall back in stories of the hardships of growing up in a war and post-war country. These stories involve everything from joking about how it is a surprise none of them died during childhood - either by being killed during the conflict or what they often describe as the lawlessness in the country up until 2010 approximately. These young adults are raised in an environment of perpetual crisis, for them, the issue of political instability is viewed as something permanent and impossible to change (Demant Frederiksen, 2013: 13).

Their stories often revolve around the regularity of people being killed, criminal gangs blackmailing children, and playing with unexploded ordinances due to the lack of toys for children. It seems that these experiences intermix with regular foreboding about a 'return' to

those experiences, diminishes feelings of stability and feeds into anxieties of potential future wars. In the grand scale of things, Bosnia seems to be a country dominated by the presence of militarisation, trauma of war and physical presence of military waste. Military waste ranges from memorials for civilian and military casualties, bombed buildings and bullet holes still present in both urban and rural areas. It can be defined as an intricate intertwining of politics and poetics of dwelling as violence imprinted on physical landscapes, as the effects of violence outlives generations and remains a constant reminder that it can strike again. Damaged environments in themselves are definitions of modern warfare, where the body is no longer the target, rather it is the environment to make it unlivable (Hening, 2019: 86-87). The landscape of Bosnia is mostly livable, yet it can be argued that in cases of mental health these traces of war remain present and cause certain levels of distress for interlocutors.

As mentioned by Edin, Bosnia can be seen as a militarised society where the public discourse instils fear, distrust and uncertainty. Unexploded mines and wartime damages/destruction which remains unrepaired blurs lines between temporalities of peacetime and wartime, feeding into situations of "radical uncertainty" and distress. This radical uncertainty creates notions of intermediacy between the past and the present (Henig, 2019: 88 & Gonzáles et al, 2019: 6). Presence of military waste and sabre rattling seems to work in symbiosis by surrounding individuals with physical and psychological reminders of wartime trauma, hindering any internal distance from those experiences. With time, the constant proximity to those experiences further breaks down the ability to move on, heal and regain trust between individuals. What remains is to move away geographically, to be able to distance themselves from the influences of militarisation and military waste.

In the case of young Bosnians, my research indicates that these anxieties are partly not originally a result of their own experience or rituals. These anxieties have mainly become a result of the vigilance practised by older generations, perpetuating fears and anxieties on younger Bosnians through their own wartime trauma. The prominence of generational trauma is regularly brought up and is described by Vedran, a 33 year old man who currently lives in Sarajevo. Vedran has lived in different regions in Bosnia including Pale and Mostar. Furthermore he lived in the US for three years to complete his bachelors' and two years in Moscow for his masters'. Currently, he is employed by the UN working with migration and integration questions.

V: When Dodik mentioned the withdrawal of institutions in Bosnia one to two months into the Ukraine war, my mother called me and said it is a good idea to keep around 500 euros at home and keep my tank full [petrol in his car]. With the idea if it comes to conflict so it is easier to flee, how shall I say it - I know my neighbour which have a son outside the country who said he would like to return, she [his neighbour] told him that he under any circumstance should not return as it is a bad idea and being outside [of Bosnia] is safer than the unstable situation here. In a way there is a high pressure [on children/young adults] to not even return, imagine that, regrettably that the situation; it is in such a way that a mother does not want her child to move back home.

B: Is it a normal sentiment to be vigilant for any future conflict?

V: Yes, it is a constant readiness, it is something people constantly keep in mind and have triggers for. Ukraine was a big trigger for that. But like, it is always there [triggers] and there are many of them. Like, a paramilitary group [Srpska Čast] marched together with the police force of Republika Srpska, they [the paramilitaries] are known for assaulting Roma and migrants and they are openly fascist more or less. And then they show up at a police parade in RS! Well, their RS chapter - they are trying to look more "clean" than in Serbia but still; for me that is a trigger. Or someone vandalises every monument with the names of people who protected Mostar during World War II, nazis smash every rock, think then in what direction the world is going, and it is just constantly in your mind to flee to a better life. It is a catastrophe.

B: But is it normal for young people too, or only the ones that survived the nineties?

V: No, the ones from the nineties have it the most, the feeling that you must flee but it has been carried over intergenerationally, like for me from my mother. I had not even considered having a full tank and keeping 500 euros but when she told me I thought "aha, she has passed through something like that [the war], so maybe it is not such a bad idea [to follow her advice]". So yeah, there are generational differences but it does not mean it does not impact younger generations.

V: It's a constant readiness and around the corner - people think of it all the time and have triggers. then you realise in what direction society is going and then you start to think about leaving - no other option remains than to just leave future catastrophes.

Based on extracts from the data above it could be concluded that fear of further political upheaval and war are prominent anxieties of young adults in Bosnia. During one interview an informant mentioned she is ever so thankful for her parents protecting her from the "raw reality" of Bosnian society and the political tensions which never seem to go away. Even if younger Bosnians often enough mainly remember the turbulent aftermath of the war, or were too young to fully comprehend the horrors of war at a young age, it still exists and is further reinforced by the generational trauma of their older relatives. Intergenerational trauma is nothing new in academia; Traumatic incidents, even when not directly experienced, still relive the traumatic events, even if in a different way. Furthermore it has been documented that it takes approximately three generations for generational traumas to heal, seemingly this process of healing has just begun for my informants (Maček et al, 2014: 146).

Taking trauma into consideration as something continuously being reinforced by older generations, younger Bosnians have their own memories of war or postwar childhoods. Arguably my interlocutors are a part of the first generation of healing. On the other hand, it is possible that healing has not even properly begun, due to constant physical and psychological pressure from remaining in a militarised society. With the abovementioned, it becomes clear that hostile and antagonistic political environments are seriously affecting the sense of security within the country. These antagonisms rely on digging up old wounds and calls to arms whenever finding themselves in a political deadlock, which further breed distrust, hopelessness and finally apathy towards societal change and future making.

The ability to imagine potential futures grounded in predictability and security are interrupted by high levels of uncertainty and wishes to avoid said uncertainty. As defined by Ilya Utekhin while doing research in post-socialist apartment complexes; members of a culture can feel threatened by ambiguous and/or unknown situations. In the case of Bosnia would be the risk of societal collapse due to war, causing signs of nervous stress and the need for predictability (Utekhin, 2018: 216 & Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 273-274). The predicaments which seem to be created are the safety felt in the daily practices of maintaining suspicion towards others and in readiness to

leave at any sign of weaponised escalation, seemingly reinforcing the vicious circle of uncertainty (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 275). These daily practices seem to create a future unable to truly establish any form of proper predictability outside the spectrum of conflict (Bryant & Knight, 2019: 198). To visualise the fear and uncertainty; Melissa who left Bosnia in April 2023 and works as a pharmacist quality control manager in Germany, explains how the physical distance from the country changes the prominence of looming thread:

> B: Yes, I see - I am wondering, what has the highest influence on the lack of safety here?
>
> M: I think it is on a local Bosnian and Herzegovian level, our politicians are constantly hyping people with very negative themes. Constantly in the media we see that "what has this politician said and who has insulted the other one more this time?". Who is promoting a new war and who has called for a new military assault? Every time before elections from one side they say "the serbs will attack again" and the other side "the Federation is lying" but sometimes the other side confirm "yes yes, Republika Srpska must widen its territory" and then the other ones says "we will not let you".
>
> Then there are discussions about a Croatian party and the politicians promise there will be one more administrative region created for them, and all those themes are in a way too much, and it is definitely something our politicians are constantly setting fire to [firing up tensions that is]. Even when there's no elections this is a regular occurrence and we as a society have gotten used to that. For example, we are already three [friends] that have left the country and we catch yourself that whenever we meet up for a beer or coffee, we talk about the latest incident and if there will be a war or if it will not - or what has Dodik [president of Republika Srpska] said and then what SDP [Social Democratic Party of Bosnia] or HDZ [Croatian Democratic Union] has confronted him with. Honestly, the situation is so stressful.
>
> M: Yes?
>
> E: It is not pleasant at all anymore and the worst is that we all know it is a lie but there is a truth in it too, that something might happen. Like, the last election was so intense with threats about a new war coming that me and my sister - my mother is of the idea "oh, nothing will happen" and that kept us calm but since we became aware both me and my

older sister [both currently do not live in Bosnia anymore] who lives in the Czech Republic, we honestly prepared a plan for if a war breaks out where to go.

M: Because it was so intense in the end and we know what our parents have went through and we do not want that to happen to them again and we have honestly “okey if it happens we are going to Czechia”, I was not in Germany at that time so we decided “then we will flee”. It is horrifying that we must think about those things, even younger people must think about it. Now it still affects me but it is easier now when I am not in that atmosphere anymore.

Political turmoil in the country combined with past experiences and traumas, both of young individuals and their older relatives ,has contributed to a lack of hope channelled through the antagonistic political rhetoric. Rather than forming a life in a secure and predictable environment, the main focus becomes the preparation for war which in turn takes away from the individual's ability to consider any form of permanent future. Futures become incalculable due to a constant sense of crisis, reinforced through national media channels. The sense of uncertainty breeds more fear and distrust into the interlocutors. The fear and distrust interferes with attempts to find pathways for creating a stable life, within a system creating an ever growing transnational community. A migration community which is the result of fear or hatred because of the destabilisation of ‘normal life’ (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 374-376).

There are potential similarities between the post-war period of Lebanon and Bosnia as there is no space for amnesia, as the state of the country has intensified the everyday recollection of war. Resulting in Bosnians being unable to forget, hindering the ability to move on, as recollections of the past regenerate the future potential for war in the present. To imagine a future without war, has been made impossible. Like Lebanon, the war is never forgotten - institutions keep the memory of war alive and warn about the high likelihood of a return to civil war. The reality of Bosnians can be seen as resembling the one of Lebanon as there is no peacetime, they live and exist in a time in-between past and future wars, which makes the future precarious, unpredictable and contested (Hermez, 2016, 148). In a sense, Bosnia is haunted, and the spectre is the past. The past spreads fear and worry though removing the predictability of the future, neither what will happen nor what the people in that context will do (Demant Fredriksen, 2013: 178).

5.6 Should I stay or should I go? Discontent and the motivation for change

A substantial portion of my informants have already left or intend on leaving, but what of the people that decide to stay? From the collected data there are indicators that those who remain, or have returned to Bosnia are still very much aware of the social issues in Bosnian society. Some of the reasons that keep informants in Bosnia are social and political factors: to leave means leaving your family and friends behind. Leaving is described with notions of loneliness or missing out on intimate family gatherings. Likewise, opposition towards the current ruling system in the country has motivated the interlocutors which have remained to be heavily involved in political movements, or organisations. When conducting an interview with Vedran, a 33 year old political scientist. His future plans are to stay in the country and motivates his decision with the following statement:

> B: And what are your motivations for staying in Bosnia?
>
> V: The main reasons are family and the will to do something in this society, like work is work but my general engagement is wider than that in regards to society and change, but also so in the political sphere. I do voluntary work for a local cultural centre in Sarajevo, and those activities make me want to stay here. Because I think someone needs to do something to change the situation in the country - like, otherwise, what is even the point?

It is by informants having left the country that their personal social circles and cultural practices like the kafana are much lamented. Furthermore, informants living abroad often talk negatively about their experiences due to a perceived lack of social life, stress and heightened social control by the State, replacing the perceived cultural social control in Bosnia. According to the words of my informants, it does seem that the regularity of interacting with friends and keeping social circles intimate are highly regarded compared to what in their opinion, is perceived as a more surface level friendship in the Western world. For all the disappointments and frustrations within Bosnia, they still show a high level of affection for the social practices which they often critique.

During a discussion on living abroad, a returnee, 33 year old Adnan with a PhD in archeology explains his experiences of living abroad. After several years of living in Denmark he was never invited to any more “intimate” events by locals, where he could expand his circle of friends and get acquainted with Danish culture. According to his perception, the times he was actually

invited to an event, it was for individual meetups isolated from any larger networks of friends. He followed up his experience with a frustrated comment “and when I moved away, not a single Dane I knew ever contacted me again”, implying that true acquaintances stay in touch and build on their friendships in Bosnia compared to Denmark.

It seems like Bosnians who chose to return partly have done it due to social reasons. Other hardships encountered occasionally touch on the topic of integrating within new cultures when living abroad. As discussed earlier regarding dwindling social circles due to the exodus from Bosnia; it seems like the young adults strive to maintain different forms of close relationships. Simultaneously, these relationships are under threat due to the precarity forcing people to move abroad. The stories of remaining, leaving or returning are commonplace, especially in relation to the dissolving localised social networks. To conclude, it seems to be a form of social alienation centred around the naturally dispersed nature of diasporas and transnational communities (Faist, 2010: 12 & 21).

Those having remained are by majority not satisfied with the current state of affairs. Discussions regarding the lack of development of infrastructure [examples: schools, public transport and healthcare] and venting about corruption are recurring topics. The outlooks of my informants are often jaded, and negative outlooks on future prospects and possibilities, which consume most spaces within discourses, impeding optimistic outlooks. Positivity frowned upon, optimism and positive outlooks seem to be associated with being naive, aloof or out of touch with the complex and almost infinite social issues found within Bosnian society. Those who have left like Melissa, use phrases as having “given up” or become “fed up” with daily challenges of Bosnian politics, wages and lack of security in general. Those who remain imply doing so against all odds due to love for the way of life, friends and family in Bosnia.

Some informants like Vedran return to Bosnia from points of resistance, or out of spite. Not towards themselves or others, rather it is spitefulness towards the hegemonic corruption and nepotism of Bosnia. To return or stay, requires finding an existential meaning in said resistance. When inquiring ‘who’ this other is, politicians and oligarchs are often the centre target for their grudges. Existentially, the most common reasoning for staying or returning is the hope for change within Bosnia. When asked to further clarify: hope comes from the absence of hope, it is often phrased with the implication that someone must do something or else no one will.

The informants which have decided to stay are generally involved in a wide variety of organisations or occupations, which can be considered as attempts to improve the quality of life within the country. These occupations vary from active participation in cultural centres, activism or for NGOs in welfare oriented roles. These professions are meant to compensate for the lack of social welfare within the country. The motivations of these informants to pursue these fields are explained with some level of spite towards the hegemonic system within the country. When probing for clarifications, reasons for their activities vary from hindering depopulation, to fighting mismanagement of the country politicians. If everyone moves and lets the political parties and their business partners gain a final/total control over the country, the scenario is described as an ultimate defeat. To move, therefore means the end of hope: of Bosnia and the future of its people. The ones which have left speak about these themes from a point of resentment and resignation, while the ones which stay often do so from the refusal to give in to those notions. It is probably hard to pinpoint exactly what makes the informants who want to change reason in such ways, corruption can be seen as a materialist condition which unsurprisingly leads to such standpoints from the local population. It seems to exist as an underlying existential reason for resistance, it is potentially an action of rebellion.

Rebels in the context of Bosnia are those who do not tolerate the transgressions of the so-called 'criminal system' within the country, and can be interpreted as a categorical rejection of a perceived intrusion which is interpreted as absolutely intolerable (Camus, 1991: 15). In a metaphysical sense, those who stay or remain with the goal to achieve some form of radical change do so in reaction to the perceived intolerable offence. These offences are viewed as committed by the Bosnian state, the centre for the majority of perceived antagonisms, bringing forward a notion of solidarity for the individual (Camus, 1991: 15-17). Acts of rebellion by informants potentially stems from oppression experiences against themelves, or perceived spectacles of oppression towards others (Camus, 1991: 18). As constant narratives and experiences of injustice, oppression and poverty are deeply ingrained and constant in conversations. The idea of rebellion against the manifestation of an illegitimate oppressive and corrupt system brings existential meaning for the individual, giving strength to manage with the challenges of Bosnian life.

5.7 Diminishing social circles and being left behind

Upon my second period in the field after New Years Eve 2023/2024, I found myself in a local kafana with three bosnians on the 14th of January. Mid-January is considered the period when the ‘diaspora leaves again’. According to one of my informants, it is explained as a lonely experience as friend groups once again are being separated geographically. In general ‘diaspora season’ refers to three subsequent periods, summertime in between June and August. The second period is in between November and January, due to the holiday seasons of Catholic and Orthodox christmas. Finally, there is also a return of the diaspora community around Bajram [Eid al-Fitr] in April. Informants refer to these periods as Bosnia coming back to life, friends reunite and family returns once again, bringing life to an otherwise depopulated environment. Social events are commonplace during these seasons due to religious practices like Eastern Orthodox Christmas on the 7th of January. Orthodox Christmas Day includes practices such as pig or lamb roasts, alcohol consumption and celebrating together with the family at home before gathering at the local church. At the Church, mulled wine and pastries are served before and after mass. Catholics and Bosniaks have similar practices around their separate holidays and often enough follow the same line of practices of communal meetups were drinking and roasting either pig or lamb are the go to main courses, often accompanied with Pogača [a white focaccia-like bread], Sarma [cabbage rolls originating from the Ottoman era] and other dishes which might vary from region to region.

When the holiday period draws to a close, there are noticeable sombre notions of loneliness in the air. Streets feel empty and the locals are either mourning the departure of friends and family, or trying to make the best out of the last couple of days before their acquaintances are going to depart once more. These notions of loneliness were prominent in the kafana on the evening on the 14th of January, the four of us where gathered around a table, having a couple of drinks. The ambience was somewhat gloomy as the recurring themes touched on feeling left behind due to the departure of the diaspora. Collective loneliness and feelings of abandonment by the coming and going of the diaspora are also felt by the ones’ having been displaced in preparation to return to their ‘new homelands’.

Anela and Zala, two local women, repeated some distinct jokes during the evening, one of them was “ode nam dijaspora - šta će mo sad?” [Our diaspora has left - what now then?], jokingly

discussing how they now are once again alone and need to stick together in Bosnia. The joke implies the alternative is total isolation until the diaspora returns. During their banter Anela mentioned she will spend a weekend in Zagreb, enticing Zala to [jokingly] accuse her of leaving her behind too. Topics like these are commonplace in the wake of friends and family leaving Bosnia in a continuous cycle. In a cultural sense, it does not seem that my informants are alone per-se, rather the cultural notion of loneliness is of both affective and subjective reality as social isolation can be both a physical and social reality. Physical and social realities do not necessarily equal each other, as an individual subjectively might have the highest risk of suffering from loneliness when physically isolated. In the case of my informants, it seems that loneliness is mainly caused by the geographical separation between local and expatriate. To be separated by distance interferes with the full participation in networks of community and care which in turn produces loneliness as a perceived notion of social isolation (Ozawa-de Silva & Parsons, 2020: 615-616).

Zala and Anela continued their conversation discussing who will be next to leave of them, this too was done as a form of banter culminating in a recurring joke about being left behind in Bosnia “pa ko je zadnji ima da ugasi svjetlo” [Who is the last one to remain, shall turn off the lights, as when leaving your home]. When I inquired Zala about the implication of that sort of humour she replied “Jer će mo svi morati odlaziti prije ili poslje” [because we will all have to leave at some point]. Keep in mind Zala is one of the locals who have no intention of leaving the country and is of the opinion that Bosnian culture and Sarajevo is her home. When asked about notions of being left behind in Bosnia in response to her previous banter with Anela:

> Zala: Well, it’s the implication [of the joke] that nothing can be done, no matter how you twist and turn; sooner or later we will all leave BiH. The majority of us use that sort of joke when we are totally disenchanted/defeated by the reality of our [Bosnias’] sad future.

In general, these sentiments feed into a recurring gloominess whenever such topics resurfaces - a type of sombre notion of accumulation of mortal coil will force everyone to leave the country behind. Metaphorically, this phenomena could be explained that the people who are constantly

forced to leave are the blood expelled from a fatal wound, it is only a question of time when Bosnia has bled dry. The metaphor comes from the informant's idea that it is futile to try to stay, the question is how long you can manage living in Bosnia before attrition gets the best of you.

Local outlooks on futures is rather the lack of futures and the lack of shared experiences with friends and family. The exodus could be interpreted as the outcome/symptom through the accumulation of different aspects. In the case of loneliness, being left behind is the loss of social capital, a definition from Bourdieu. Social capital is explained as a form of resources within different power relations. In his definition of social capital aspects such as belonging, contacts and networks to other individuals are a form of resource. By having a high social capital individuals gain higher legitimacy within one of several groups, where the individual gains influence to mobilise others (Bourdieu, 1986: 21). The constant dispersing of social cliques could therefore be seen as a recurring drain on the social capital of individuals living in Bosnia.Dispersion thus hinders them from achieving a certain social stability and safety which might be expected within more intimate relations. Friends, partners and family become relations which are hard to invest time and effort in due to the irregular arrival and departure of the diaspora, and the risk that anyone who currently lives in the country might become a part of the diasporic community.

6. A normal life means a safe life - concluding remarks and findings

To summarise the findings of this essay and conclude the empirical material, I would like to clarify the necessity for the inclusion of all-encompassing themes touching on both the expressed notions from my informants. The best way to explain the living conditions in Bosnia would be through their everyday life. Additionally through the notions and experiences that have shaped them to who they are today. The final conclusion of my findings will be found bellow:

The conclusions realised through my fieldwork expands upon established narratives of the reasons for high migration numbers from Bosnia. Previous material often rely on quantitative data focusing on economical satisfaction and quality of life. By turning the scope of my research towards the micro-perspective for documenting the cultural and social life of young Bosnians and their daily challenges. The aim has been to provide an outline for potential future research on specific countries in the Balkan region or specific social groups within Bosnia. By conducting research focused on structural conditions of Bosnia and its influence on their citizens, the daily lives of the interlocutors has been studied. The goal of this qualitative research has been to document how notions of belonging, economical and social mobility within Bosnian society affects their ability to strive and work towards their own futures. My findings do not indicate one specific issue or challenge that creates precarious living conditions like distrust or hopelessness, rather it is the accumulation of different cultural, societal and political conditions. Together these challenges create an environment of distinct perceptions of vulnerability and distrust in young adults. The main notions and topics brought forward by my informants touch upon themes of precarious living conditions in relation to social and political security, often seen as the result of political antagonism, lack of institutionalised safety nets and high rates of emigration.

Deep rooted restrictions placed on the individual though cultural expectations and practices found in both private and public spheres of life further complicate the lives of young adults in an already challenging environment. This thesis thus strives to combine conclusions from my research and from earlier studies that need to be seen holistically. Only through a holistic approach can they explain the intricate relation between macro and micro perspectives affecting the daily lives of different demographic groups within Bosnia. These conclusions together shine a light on how young adults perceive notions of security, social mobility, loneliness and distrust towards one another.

The findings from the fieldwork indicate that young adults in Bosnia are required to navigate a society which generally does not provide them with necessary tools for achieving economic autonomy and social security, to remain undisturbed in fulfilling their anticipated futures. Examples of these tools would be social protection and upholding of human rights as minorities are still heavily discriminated against. The resources allocated for social programmes and spaces for young adults, to have the ability to create wide and healthy social networks are currently insufficient. These tools could be used to structure their life on their own accords or to be able to plan accordingly for their future goals. Frustration, hopelessness and distrust are the main themes related to social, cultural and economical restrictions encountered within the country. These so-called by-products of precarious living situations are partly related to lacklustre welfare or social security. The resulting environment stands in conflict with the sought after self-reliance of young adults, due the necessity of over-reliance on informal security networks. These informal social security networks often result in expectations to conform to conservative ways of life, ill suited to accommodate the requirements of young adults.

Living in unsafe environments plagued by corruption and high levels of public discontent have also resulted in a smaller, yet noticeable group of informants deciding to remain/return to Bosnia. The ones who stay/return do so with the goal to improve the situation for themselves and others, by either involving themselves in activism or working for NGOs. Work within NGOs are often roles focused on providing services usually substituting non-existent mental health clinics or other social welfare related roles. For other informants that seek out positions within human rights organisations often work within roles dealing with social issues like discrimination. These initiatives come from a notion of resistance to the all-encompassing hegemonic power structure explained in the introduction of this thesis.

Alternatively, informants which have either left or are in the process of leaving the country have done so after succumbing to the many challenges of Bosnian society, interpreted as the result of attrition. The reason for leaving is explained by informants as the ability to create a future for themselves in the country has become impossible. Notions of resignation summarised as ‘giving up on solving an impossible problem’ are the main motivations for leaving the country. These negative notions towards one's own society and culture have resulted in normalised opinions of despair and cynicism. These feelings of cynicism and despair have become deeply ingrained in

the culture and psyche of the interlocutors, complicating the finding of motivation in such a challenging environment. This hostile environment fuels deep rooted suspicions towards others within said society. Furthermore, hope or anticipation for a better life is usually expressed as either social, political or economic terms. Meanwhile, security and stability are generally less anticipated in the rural areas of the Republic or Federation. For rural areas in The Republic, Vienna is usually described as the only real prospect for a better life. The reason why individuals from the Republic might prefer to move to Vienna rather than to the capitol might partly be due to geography as Vienna geographically is closer. There also might be demographic reasons why Vienna is preferred but that is outside the scope of the thesis. Rural informants from the Federation have relocated to Sarajevo, either finding the city sufficient with options or later choose to migrate as they find the opportunities of Sarajevo insufficient.

The most common themes the diasporic or migrant community mention for leaving the country often relate to discrimination based on gender or sexuality, political turmoil or cultural restrictions. These conclusions come from the themes often discussed between interlocutors in interviews, in between friends and sometimes even with strangers. The anxious themes and defeatist statements present in Bosnian conversations could partly be interpreted as a by-product of the conditions in which they exist, that has become embodied in verbal communication and physical movement.

Cultural expectations on young adults in Bosnia seem to be rooted in patriarchal gender roles where men are expected to acquire an education and a stable job, often described as a tradesman. Women are expected to stay out of education and are encouraged to settle down with a husband, preferably focusing on child rearing and home chores. My informants have explained that the social stigma of diverging from the expected lifestyle and goals of the individual in question, often leads to shunning and discouragement by the local community to achive complicity, further enforced with looming threats of violence. Shunning takes many different forms for different groups, people within the LGBT+ community mention everything from discrimination within the educational system or limited options when requesting healthcare, while women often bring up the lack of legal action against perpetrators. As discussed with several informants, police indifference towards harassment and targeting of women is another aspect of discrimination that further pushes individuals, particularly women to seek stability and protection in other countries.

Discussions regarding the negative, hopeless and unjust are thus recurring as a ventilation of all these negative notions and experiences, which seem to be all-encompassing for Bosnians but with different main concerns and topics explaining the core issue of their situation based on their ethnicity, gender and/or age group.

The other prominent traditional cultural expectation is parental, allowing parents to have a relatively high control over their children, is further dictated by traditional family hierarchies in Bosnia. To paraphrase a young man when holding a group interview the term ‘dok si pod mom krovom’ which translates to ‘as long as you’re under my roof’ extends the parental authority over younger generations, especially as younger generations regularly live with their parents until their late twenties or thirties. Living with parents is partly the result due to issues with finding a secure employment which also provides enough capital to rent your own household. Living with your parents results in not truly leaving the liminal position found in teenagers, while simultaneously lowering their position in the social hierarchy inside the family unit. Having a lower position due to housing can potentially lead to less autonomy and higher risks of arguments or reprisals when acting out of line from the wishes of your parents. Parental control in combination with the already lack of social spaces and dwindling social circles together contribute further to how young adults feel restricted in the country.

This has been documented especially in rural areas where my time spent in-between intergenerational households have given me an insight in the traditional family hierarchy, where peers and elders more often than not have a higher status and entitlement when voicing their opinion and deciding judgement of their surroundings, invalidating the voices of younger generations. Another important factor to consider is the lack of sufficient social services which does seem to create an asymmetrical power hierarchy, further reinforcing the authority of elders within a family which acts as a form of social security network. Young adults in Bosnia seem to find restrictions of agency in public when engaging with everyday challenges, but also in their intimate and familial spaces which depend on the strictness of the family unit. Social restrictions in public and private life thus seem to be one of many contributing factors for deciding to leave the country.

There is an aspect of healing, as my informants are repeating, something quite common for Bosnians in general: ‘all must die for something new to begin’. It is impossible to claim that even

the war generation, post-war generations and the ones which left early enough to avoid the brunt of war are in some way carrying a generational trauma. The trauma in question is often mentioned, discussed and re-lived through the sharing of war stories and traumatic experiences, varying from everything to walking through minefields or the loss of family members. These narrative stories which in one way seem to be a unifying factor for people as a way to express what they have gone through, does seem to further feed into notions of distrust. The process of healing seems to only have started in scattered cliques of young adults and miniscule amount of the older generations.

The lack of healing is due to the conditions within the country, while the ones which have left often mention the distance from 'everything' contributes to being able to process whatever is 'left behind'. Why is this important to mention? It is important for the conclusion that Bosnian society does not seem to let its population heal in the first place, constantly recurring recollections as a symptom together with the depopulation of a root cause bound in the social, societal, political and institutional flaws seemly creating a notion of uncertainty on their lives. It is noticeable especially in the lack of foresight an individual could use to 'predict' the future in relationships and career. In Bosnia that does not seem to be the case to an extreme extent, especially in regards to the threatening overtones of future wars from the antagonistic political

blocks. To conclude, my findings indicate that informants having partaken in this fieldwork remain torn between staying in a precarious environment with a near constant weight of the post-war conditions, or moving to other countries where the prospects of creating a future remain more secure and predictable in relation to politics, career and social life.

In regards to social and economical mobility Bosnia is not a country which caters to the young population. During the fieldwork, it has been brought to my attention that life in Bosnia seems quite stationary. Life is stationary in job prospects, social life and sense of chronic insecurity, which could be described as an unholy trinity of challenges that pushes people to relocate outside the country. The people who stay still recognise the daily challenges of Bosnian life where work offers few options for vertical mobility in regards to work and income, for interlocutors to invest in their own future plans, to either move to their own home, travel extensively or to sustain a family. Social life is also affected due to the exodus for greener pastures as loneliness, as intimate friendships are geographically divided, only brought together by sporadic periods when

the diaspora returns to the country. These notions of loneliness for the interlocutors in Bosnia could be explained as notions of being left behind, and living in an environment of dwindling social life with few options for socialising or engaging in diverse activities.

Lastly, a lack of social mobility due to stagnation in future planning, creating stationary lives with few anticipations for what the future may bring. As Bosnia is viewed as a place in between conflicts, political turmoil and the looming threat of returning to war times, discourages investments in local environments as it is viewed as likely to be taken away, not that they necessarily are able to buy land in the first place due to their low wages. On the other hand, the aspects named above does not discourage Bosnians from prusuing higher education, rather education is more of an mandatory requirement for having any prospects in life, remaining the main option for some sense of continuity and future making. Higher education remains a double edged sword for many as it does not let the individual make an active choice to pursue other forms of life due to high expectations placed on them by family and society at large. In general, these issues cause young adults to struggle by remaining in a liminal position,due to the incredibly high expectations placed on individuals coming of age.

But is there room for further research? When beginning my fieldwork, my suspicions for why young people are leaving Bosnia was built upon earlier quantitative research, believing it is motivated purely by unemployment or low wages. My expectations for this thesis was to focus on the future making of young adults through their motivation to relocate to other countries, and to investigate what hopes and wants migration had to offer. Instead, the thesis took a turn, uncovering that economic incentive rarely makes up the foundation for migrating, rather it is an intricate network of cultural practices and social conditions which together provides a highly challenging environment for taking control over one's own life.

These challenges have made some interlocutors leave due to reaching their own breaking point, rather than actively following golden promises of wealth and status elsewhere. The ones who stayed behind are highly engaged in organisations or professions meant to change Bosnia for the better, even if their frustration and cynical outlooks on the state of the country are deeply ingrained in their opinions. It would be wrong to state that Bosnia has been ‘unveiled’ in this thesis, rather there are many potentials in conducting further research on cultural life and feelings of entrapment within such a precarious society. This thesis has mainly been focused on mapping

out the general notions and future making of young Bosnians, which could be used to launch new studies in the lives of different demographic groups, as the country has a plethora of different regions with highly localised cultural practices. Because, what is truly ‘the state of things’ from the local point of view, when a new location is explored?

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