

DUST

BOOK TWO

PART THREE

FROM THE BANLIEUES OF PARIS TO THE IMAM'S TOMB IN BANJA LUKA

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BEGGARS

Each country has its own kind of beggar. They are a feature of every large city in the wealthier countries of Europe. But even the poorest countries have beggars.

Beggars in the Ukraine in the chaotic months after the fall of communism were hardly different from the queues of professional people, desperately hawking watches and family heirlooms, in order to buy basic necessities, bread and milk. Elderly peasant women crouched by the roadside trying to sell bunches of withered carrots or turnips, the meagre produce from their tiny gardens, for a few coins. The beggars sat alongside them, patiently waiting.

In Belgrade, the beggars live on vain hopes: bold gypsy children noisily accost anyone, until driven forcibly off. In Sarajevo, the beggars can rely on donations, even from the poorest. This Muslim tradition of not shunning beggars finds expression in the *Thousand and One Nights*. In these stories beggars figure as important characters. A person's fate can change in the bat of an eyelid: the rich lose everything and the

poor inherit kingdoms. We are rich by chance, not as a reward for work or virtue.

Poverty is not a punishment for bad behaviour.

In affluent western countries, beggars perfect wheezes to attract money: the nature of these wheezes reflects each place's national character.

In Paris, gaunt and wasted drug addicts roam the metro carriages, soliciting with urgency and giving exaggerated victim performances, conscious that the hard-hearted French need extra persuasion. These beggars seem to be on the verge of death, frail bodies about to collapse, but when the train arrives at the following station, they miraculously regain energy, and leap agilely onto the platform to enter the next carriage and give a repeat performance.

Oslo beggars dress as raggedly as possible, like actors preparing for parts in *Les Misérables*. Their pungent stink disturbs and embarrasses the clean and disciplined Norwegians into parting with money.

Mendicancy in Rome is a tradition, as time-honoured as prostitution. A family affair, grandmothers, mothers as well as children work the streets like a professional army, unashamed, daring to be physical, tugging at the sleeve, rubbing against people like cats, murmuring appeals that have been the same for centuries, and afterwards calling to each other to realign the troops.

Illegal immigrants make up a large proportion of beggars in London. Mothers crouch with babies. Boys and girls sleep rough: a unique English phenomenon reflecting the nature of dysfunctional family lives in which children split so easily from abusive or uncomprehending parents. A number of people choose to be beggars. They abandon career and prosperity to sleep in shop doorways, but retain dignity and pride. Alan Bennett describes an elderly woman who, for her last years, lived in a caravan by his house. After her death he discovered that she had been a professional pianist in her youth, a pupil of Alfred Cortot. Several similar characters slept rough around St

James's Church on Piccadilly. Eccentric and intelligent, they took part in the life of the church. One, who used to work in the City of London, had a banker brother, and now slept in the church garden. He rummaged in dustbins outside restaurants for his supper. Another played the violin by the main entrance. He performed with little skill, and his scraping with hints of familiar melodies recalled Grillparzer's *Der Armer Spielmann*, in which a poor fiddler also aspires and fails to play great music, snatches of Beethoven barely recognizable to the listener. Such a figure haunts the last song of Schubert's *Winterreise*, in which a young man, alienated by disappointment in life, is tempted to join an old organ grinder, one of life's rejects, whose begging plate is always empty. Another St James's regular, Lavinia, a bag lady with long grey hair arranged in a bun, wisps flying, spoke with a refined accent. One day she announced a desire to visit Paris, and was never seen again.

Viennese beggars come mainly from adjoining Eastern European countries. These young people hope to find work and then return home. Begging is a temporary vocation, to make ends meet.

With the exception of Rome, beggars in Europe prick the conscience of society and are seen as a problem. Roman beggars are as fully integrated into the social web as the architecture and the street ice-cream sellers.

THE BANLIEUES OF PARIS

We began to search support for reconstructing the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka by visiting community leaders in Paris, those Muslims and Catholics who were already co-operating.

The district of St Denis lies just beyond the ring road, which separates the centre of Paris from the rest of the city. Fouad Imarraine, an imam and lecturer on Islam, worked there and had established an Islamic centre with library, bookshop, worship

area and meeting rooms. He represented a liberal branch of Islam which wanted to cooperate with other faiths, and integrate into Europe. He described himself as French first, and as a Muslim second. He took us straight from Charles de Gaulle airport to the office of Père Gaudeul who ran the Secretariat for Relations between the French Catholic Church and Islam. We would have a longer meeting with Père Gaudeul the next day. We had also hoped to meet Michel Dubost, Bishop of Evry, a suburb of Paris, one of the few bishops concerned about improving relations between Christians and Muslims in his diocese. At first he refused to see us, explaining that relations between faith communities in France were now delicate, and he did not want interference from outsiders. However when he later learned of our work in Banja Luka, where he had been an army chaplain during the Bosnia War, he offered to arrange meetings on our future visits.

France has a troubled colonial history of unresolved relationship with large immigrant populations from North Africa, mainly Algeria. Like the ethnic communities in the UK they suffered from discrimination, suspicion and racial hatred. Zinedine Zidane could become a French hero because of his genius as a footballer and for scoring goals that won France the world cup in 1998. His name appeared in lights over the Arc de Triomphe, and he is recognized as one of the greatest players of all time, joining the pantheon of French heroes alongside Napoleon and Charles de Gaulle. In the same manner, the black Olympic gold medallist Linford Christie was allowed to carry the flag for Great Britain. But despite the glory these children of immigrants brought their respective countries, violent and grudging stand-offs between the communities in the poor areas of Great Britain and France kept tensions high, stoked in France by influential right-wing racist politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen, followed by his daughter Marine le Pen, who would take over leadership of his

party, the Front National. The film *La Haine* examines these issues, focusing on the merciless, and ultimately lethal, relationship between young coloured people and the police. A generation ago in a Europe, still coming to terms with the consequences of murderous fascism, the views of racist politicians used to be treated with embarrassment and scorn, kept at the back of the shelf or trashed. But now they have become subjects for serious consideration in leading articles in broadsheets and colour supplements, as though such intolerant opinions were a respectable part of rational argument.

9:11 further exacerbated tensions between Muslims and the West. Because of Israel's position in the Middle East, Jews were once again being made the scapegoats for the world's problems: 'It's your fault this happened!' This led to a revival of anti-Semitism. Then in the following years, however, the waters muddied with unlikely alliances between those who would once have organized pogroms against Jews: far-right Muslim haters and Israel, now seen as a Western bulwark in the Middle East against the tide of militant Islam.

The three young protagonists in *La Haine* try to survive on a banlieue housing estate like St Denis. Each represents the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. The film is not only making a political point. These characters seethe with untapped potential. This waste of energy and passion makes their fate tragic. What could these clever and resourceful men not achieve if they were not so discriminated against and discouraged? So they end up in violent self-destruction, leaving the world limper and poorer. The film follows the three men on one day and night, like any other in their lives empty of opportunity and future. The final death is shockingly sudden, abrupt and inconsequential: just another lout dead. A few years after the film was made, and two years after our visit, the banlieues exploded into street battles between youths and the police; cars being set alight.

Nine years later similar riots would wreck the streets of London. The issue was not so much racism as the alienation of a young generation, made to feel it had no constructive part in society. An African proverb puts it: 'If young people are not initiated into the life of the village, they will burn it down, just to keep warm.'

We spent the evening with Fouad Imarraine and were joined by Jean-Pierre Bacqué, secretary general of the Groupe d'Amitié Islamo-Chrétienne, who organized seminars and conferences but seemed uneasy about being involved in anything else more practical. Fouad, though busy, planned to come to Banja Luka, bringing Muslims from Paris to visit the beleaguered Islamic community. Jean Pierre Bacqué reminded us that Islam had been represented in France since the 8th century. The Moors may have been driven out of Spain in the late Middle Ages, a key historical event that defined Europe as being exclusively Christian, but long before the Ottoman invasion of South Eastern Europe, Islam had been part of the continent. The cultural influence of Islam had already become part of its heritage.

Next day, on a fund-raising mission, we followed a recommended contact and visited the offices of Thales Naval on the Boulevard Haussman, their elegance contrasting with the shabby back streets of St Denis where groups of ragged individuals loafed about. After negotiating the strict security procedures we were allowed inside the building to meet Nicholas Schwartz, the personnel manager.

Nicholas Schwartz, a well educated smartly dressed young man, was an influential person who could help the Catholic cause in Banja Luka. His colleague joined us. This young woman did cultural aid work in Bosnia, organizing children's theatre and clowns, driving groups there in the holidays. Happy with her work, and not modest about the sacrifices involved, she doubted we could cooperate.

Nicholas Schwartz wanted to do more with his life than make money in big business. He involved himself voluntarily with the Conference of Catholic European Churches, having spent two years at the Vatican Youth Ministry, and one year in Pakistan. The interest and challenges made up for the tedium of his paid work. That part of his life gave him a sense of purpose. His position at Thales Navel gave him access to high level contacts.

Ifet Mustafic, the secretary to the Reis ul Ulema in Bosnia, had given us his name because Nicholas Schwartz had been a participant at a conference of European Churches in Sarajevo in 2001. Nicholas Schwartz told us of the common declaration in the aftermath of September 11 agreed at the conference, which had been hosted by the inter-religious council, and attended by Dr Ceric and Rabbi Finci. If the Orthodox Metropolitan Nikolai had taken part, his support for the declaration ended when he moved out of Sarajevo, to live in Foca, and issued statements discouraging inter-religious activities. However the conference did agree on a common prayer. The Catholic St Egidio Community were represented. We would meet them on our visit to Rome later. Nicholas Schwartz described the conference as ‘choosing pitches and camera angles’. This confirmed our suspicion that the inter-religious council was not concerned with joint projects and practical solutions.

A pattern emerged of people like Fouad Imarraine and Nicholas Schwartz taking an interest, surprised at our initiative, and promising to help or visit Banja Luka, but then being inundated with responsibilities and other projects closer to home. They also offered to introduce us to people of influence who turned out to be unhelpful, people with their own agendas. We were not putting our case clearly. Eventually I wrote *the white house: From Fear to a Handshake* about one project in detail: the mediation at Omarska. It was intended to describe the way we operate, so, in future, people can understand how we work.

Nicholas Schwartz recommended we visit the Algerian imam of the Paris Mosque, reckoned to be a moderate. Père Gaudeul told us afterwards that there was no point in seeing a man who could claim only limited support from the Muslims in Paris. After 9:11 the community had split down the middle. Nicholas Schwartz had already alerted us to the issues tearing at the heart of the community, most significantly the issue of violence, importing Muslim conflict into Europe, and the battle between terrorism and moderation.

He also gave us thought-provoking information that Le Pen's extreme right party's surprise success at the polls came from the sudden unexpected influx of the Jewish vote. 9:11 had shaken allegiances and obliterated past hatreds to create alliances in opposition to Islam.

Orthodox bishops behaved like some sort of God. They saw you when, and only if they pleased, whatever arrangements were made. So when we arrived at the appointed time to meet Metropolitan Kaligiorgis at the Paris Orthodox Church nothing surprised us, not even being told that no one had been told of our visit, even though we had been fixing the meeting for weeks. A kindly priest ushered us into the Metropolitan's study, and we waited in vain for the appearance of his holiness. The throne behind the desk remained empty and for an hour we talked across the room at the embarrassed-looking priest, who perpetually glanced in the direction of the door, through which the bishop might appear at any moment.

We spoke about the isolation of Bishop Jefrem in Bosnia, and, though the priest listened sympathetically, we felt that Orthodox bishops were not interested in other dioceses. Orthodox bishops were autonomous. However, Metropolitan Kaligiorgis had a reputation for being concerned with inter-religious issues, and so we were justifiably hopeful that he might take an interest in our work.

The bishop resolutely refused to appear. A male secretary politely served us coffee and brought the Metropolitan's mail, laying it out neatly on the desk.

After leaving we looked round the dark, cavernous and opulently decorated interior of the Orthodox cathedral, the atmosphere heavy with decades of incense and candle smoke, silver glinting around the icons, saints and angels wafting up the walls into shadows and darkness.

Aristocratic refugees from the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 fled to Paris and established this cathedral as their spiritual home: a bastion of Orthodoxy in exile from the homeland Russia, which had been turned into the Soviet Union.

As a three year old girl, Princess Ludmilla escaped the violence with her parents. They fled through the cornfields of the Ukraine, carrying precious icons, which now decorated her home in Kitzbühel, Austria, as well as her flat in central Paris, near the expensive shopping street of Rue St Honoré. The family settled in Beirut, Lebanon, and her mother arranged the marriage of Ludmilla to Georges, a wealthy Greek banker, a kindly bookish man. Ludmilla lived to see the collapse of communism. In her late seventies, after the death of her husband, she insisted on returning to see the fatherland, and witnessed the renaissance of the Orthodox Church there. She described meeting peasant women in shawls being delighted to meet her. They grasped and kissed her hands, wept and bore no ill will for her ancestry. They were also glad to sell her matryushki, Russian dolls, and yards of embroidered linen.

Donald had taught Ludmilla English in the Lebanon, and they remained friends. She lavished Russian hospitality on us every time we paid a visit, commissioned paintings and taught me Russian. We spent hours reading and translating Pushkin together, including the monk Pimen's speech in *Boris Godunov*, about the importance of chronicling history and the need to remember the past, both good and bad. We also studied the prologue from *Ruslan and Ludmilla* which celebrates the imagination. As

she recited the lines: *tam ruskiyi duxh, tam rusuyu paxhnet, the scent of Russia is there; there breathes Russia*, her eyes flashed and she raised an arm in a gesture of defiance. Meanwhile Mountaha, her faithful Lebanese maid, prepared meals, fragrant Arab chicken dishes with apricots, rice and almonds, small Russian piroshki stuffed with spinach, cheese and pine nuts, and baked apples sliced on thin sheets of buttery pastry. Guests, friends and family were invited several times a week for suppers, at which politics, religion and art were discussed. Guests included retired singers and pianists, industrialists, ambassadors and politicians. On one occasion I found myself sitting opposite an elderly and unrepentant former Nazi leader of an SS battalion. Tall, strong and still handsome, he reminded me of my intimidating grandfather. The Nazi extolled the benefits of fascism. He was married to Ludmilla's sister, who glanced at me remorsefully, hoping I would understand and forgive her youthful error of judgement. On another occasion I sat opposite a young Palestinian freedom fighter, who happened to be related to Mountaha's husband, George's driver.

Ludmilla entertained in the manner of the Russian aristocracy as described in Tolstoy's novels. She did not stint on hospitality. The rooms were always ready for guests: large beds and towels, fresh flowers from the garden, little decorated pots filled with sweets and nuts, bowls of fruit with knives and napkins, bottles of sparkling water and wine with glasses on silver salvers, shelves of art and guide books, and the walls covered in paintings and icons.

Ludmilla took us to the cathedral whenever we visited her in Paris. A slim, beautiful and elegantly dressed woman, with striking high cheek bones inherited from her Tartar grandmother, she bent over the icons, touching the images with full lips while a delicate tracery of pale blue veins pulsed visibly beneath her transparent ivory smooth skin. She would then bow her head approvingly at us while we stood at the back listening to the soulful singing of the choir, with tears in our eyes.

She reminded me of Princess Mary in *War and Peace*, one of the most tenderly portrayed characters, which Tolstoy based on his mother. Tolstoy, the iconoclast, took a sceptical, but kindly, view of her devotion to the Orthodox religion. In one particularly affecting chapter, the princess dreams of escaping the tyranny of her father and the privilege of her wealthy aristocratic home, to join the 'holy' community of poor women who roam across Russia worshipping at important shrines, and who beg for a living. Ludmilla would no more have sacrificed her position and home than Princess Mary, but their devotion to the Orthodox religion was shared and absolute. Both used their position to support the church and help the beggars. Princess Mary did so by the backdoor, to avoid the criticism and mockery of her father. Ludmilla had no need; Georges would have forbidden her nothing.

Because Donald was a priest she seated him on her right side at the table, ahead of all the other guests, even politicians or industrial magnates. Like Princess Mary, she laid greater store on people's behaviour and their spiritual life than on power or position. At one time these women were a significant part of Russian society, a civilizing influence on male political power games. After the collapse of communism, the Orthodox Church experienced a renaissance in Russia, with money being poured into the rebuilding of cathedrals and churches that had been destroyed or neglected in cities across the country. Substantial contributions came, not from wealthy women, but from ruthless businessmen who became rich in the first years of the free market economy.

Standing again in the Paris Orthodox cathedral, we remembered Ludmilla, now elderly and living in Kitzbühel. The cathedral had not changed, and the incense laden gloom reminded me of old recordings by the bass Fyodor Chaliapin, who sang here to encourage the defiant survival of the persecuted Orthodox community of Russia in the

years after the Revolution. Another recording, by the cathedral choir of Gretchaninov's setting of the liturgy, became a bestseller for decades, constantly being chosen on Desert Island Discs. The opulently-toned soloist penetrates through the sizzle of shellac, while the choir provides full-throated accompaniment. The imploring music is drenched in emotion. For as long as communism ruled, this cathedral became an outpost, not only of Russian Orthodoxy, but of a tradition, an aristocratic past that had little to do with peasant women in shawls crossing themselves and kissing icons. Smartly dressed worshippers like Ludmilla were gripping tightly to their past.

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A WHITE FATHER

'Do you think I'm crazy?' Donald wanted to know, having given a presentation of our work in Bosnia to Père Gaudeul, outlining our projects.

'Only eighty per cent!' replied Père Gaudeul with a laugh, and then proceeded to give us names and contacts.

We then spoke about the problems for Muslims in Europe, the threat of terrorism and the rise in anti-Semitism. Fouad Imarraine had published a communiqué telling young Muslims to stop such activity. 'We are French *and* Muslim,' was his main message.

Fouad Imarraine being progressive exerted more influence than traditional imams. For him, the Grand Mufti of Paris was an irrelevance. Eighty five percent of Muslims in France no longer worshipped. This majority considered muftis to be representative of a low-grade, primitive Islam. Not understanding and paying attention to the cultural divide between traditional and modern Islam meant that conservative traditionalists, struggling to keep their authority, encouraged extremism. Because the Algerian government financed the Paris Mosque, it was despised.

Père Gaudeul had worked as a representative of the White Fathers in North Africa. The film *Of Gods and Men* told the story of their massacre when the monks were caught between rival political factions, pro- French government forces fighting rebels suspicious of all kinds of European colonialism, whether spiritual or economic. This painful history made Père Gaudeul's remark: 'Religion is *not* an ideology,' particularly poignant.

Meeting people constituted the core business of our journeys. Most of our encounters were with those who had their own agendas. They wanted our help too. Often they told us what they thought we wanted to know. For this reason we also cultivated relationships with people who had no agendas, who just wanted to be friends.

IBRICA AND ARON

Friendships, made separately from the work, provide another perspective. They offer insights into everyday life. Two friends in particular taught me about the difficulties of coming to terms with being citizens of different countries that were once united. From being Yugoslavian they became in Ibritza's case a Bosnian Muslim, and in Aron's case a Jewish Serbo-Croat. Ibritza's trauma had to do with losing home and family and having to accept a specifically Bosnian Muslim identity. Being from a mixed family, Aron hankered after the beauty and security of a once large and culturally diverse country while wandering footloose between Croatia and Serbia, but also venturing into regions that the war had made foreign and even hostile to him.

Ibrahim, Ibritza to his friends, studied physics at Sarajevo University, and trained to be a broadcaster and teacher. He lived with his sister in Zenica, and received a stipend of around twenty euro a month from a German charity. This supplemented his income as a private tutor to children, preparing for exams at around four euro a session. He

was bracingly pessimistic about our work: 'What you are trying to do is good, but it is too difficult. You will never succeed.' His parents died during his childhood, not in the war, but many relatives were killed in the fighting, so he hated to talk about death; he had lost too many people in his life. His sister suffered from surviving a decimated family, so Ibrica put on a brave face for her sake, and could never allow his emotions to get the better of him. Most people I met in Bosnia had developed a thick skin of cynicism to cover their trauma.

Adnan looked suspiciously at Ibritza, wondering about financial motivation. In fact Ibritza only wanted to talk and was sensitive about money issues, making a point of paying for my drink when we met. He treated me as a visitor and guest in his country.

He opened his heart to me and could talk about the burden of family loss and trauma, latching on to me from the beginning like an abandoned pet, which gladly attaches itself to a new master. He made no demands other than the chance to talk to me.

Ibritza represented the reality of life for ordinary Bosnians, those not qualified enough to work for international agencies which paid decent salaries, but those who had no wish to leave their homeland. For all the bleakness of his life and prospects he resolutely refused to accept help from me, because he knew it would affect our friendship. 'My problems are my own,' he said. 'I need you more as a friend.'

For all the wretchedness of his life he always managed to be in good spirits, happy with a coffee and a cigarette, though the excessive smoking threatened to destroy his health faster than the low standard of his living. He lived on occasional pasta and bread, and studied through the night, when his sister and several cousins, who shared the flat in Zenica, had gone to bed. His eyes misted over thinking about a future wife and children. He had no prospects of supporting a family for the time being. 'I love babies,' he kept telling me. Friendship with me was his life line.

He reminded me of pictures in Bishop Komarica's house which depicted Muslim men, in fezes, seated cross-legged on the ground outside houses and shops, or in fields, allowing life and history to pass by. The men smoke, drink, and are tolerant and philosophical, while others fret and agonize about altering the world to their own design: impossible objectives that, more often than not, cause disruption and grief.

Being part Jewish with a Serb mother and a Croatian father, Aron, the student from Zagreb who gave me the 1984 Winter Olympics map of Yugoslavia, had a more inclusive attitude to Bosnia. He spent his free time hiking across the Balkans, including Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece. He had recently travelled to Kosovo and managed to penetrate the Orthodox monastery of Pec. When Milosevic's troops had been forced by NATO to retreat after the war in Kosovo, the Orthodox Church there suffered huge losses of monasteries and churches in Kosovo, on a scale that for Serbs constituted the destruction of their heritage at the hands of vengeful Albanian Kosovans.

Aron particularly enjoyed hiking down the Eastern border of Bosnia, the heartland of Bosnian Serb nationalism, and a part of the country even Adnan balked at visiting, saying: 'They do not know there the war is over; no one told them.' Aron loved the beauty of the terrain: a wild lawless region.

Aron's Jewishness meant he felt no allegiance to any particular community, and he mourned the passing of the inclusiveness of the former Yugoslavia, regretting the hard divisions between countries. He refused to write his mother's address in Novi Sad as Serbia. He had known the whole region to be a melting pot of cultures and traditions, all of them enriching this part of Europe. So, unlike Ibrica, he wanted to take an active part in our work, hoping to be of use in the future, to write articles and make films.

Given the individual agendas, lies and prevarications of most of the people we dealt with on our projects, we needed to be reminded of the reality on the ground. Aron and Ibrica became compass points for us. Others we met tended to be more cynical or openly bigoted, like Branko the teacher from Banja Luka who claimed not to be prejudiced but took the hard line nationalist view that Muslims and Serbs should be kept apart.

Most people we met wanted jobs, homes and a peaceful life. They did not care whether their society was inclusive or not. They resented foreign interference, and being reminded of crimes and atrocities they had not committed personally. Nor did they care whether we thought they condoned the crimes.

By 2014 Ibrica worked as a weather-forecaster, moved into a flat in the centre of Sarajevo, went on conferences around the world, remained suspicious of Serbs, and sold the family house in Doboj, where Muslims had been ethnically cleansed. He also married and had children.

Aron wandered the world, trekking across the Middle East and Far East, having adventures, taking courses on meditation and esoteric studies. He stayed rootless and described himself mockingly as the Wandering Jew.

Our colleagues in Bosnia did not approve of him. They considered his presence on our project for a memorial at the Omarska killing camp to be a form of indulgence, coming to gawp at places of horror. I judged him less harshly, encouraging the travelling, learning and observing, so he would become a better, wiser and more perceptive writer. Still young, he needed time to learn and mature. The Bosnians who worked with us were the same age, but direct personal experience of war had made them older in mind and spirit. They also knew their futures depended on making immediate changes to their country. They had no time for observing and waiting.

On one occasion Aron accompanied us to Sejkovac, a small town near Sanski Most in the Federation, where hundreds of bodies found in a mass grave in a field near Omarska were laid out on the floor of a large barn waiting to be identified. The smell of death was overpowering, piles of clothes neatly placed by each skeleton, cracked skulls placed on tables. The staff watched us silently. The shocked, grief-stricken look in their eyes showed that, however professionally they needed to be, they could never get used to the scale of the atrocity. Aron emerged shattered. Emir our translator and Anil our driver observed our distress. Anil decided at that moment to work with us. A day later, when Aron had left for Zagreb, Emir turned to me in the car and angrily insisted that we never invite Aron on our project again, describing him as a frivolous tourist. Aron's fear of seeing dead bodies upset Emir. Emir, also afraid, had refused to come into the hangar with us. But whereas Emir's fear was based on the trauma of having lost family, and living under perpetual threat from neighbours who greeted him regularly with the gesture of a knife slicing the throat, Aron treated the visit as an adventure, something to write home about, to show how brave he had been. This attitude disgusted Emir.

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After Paris we set off for Rome where we were determined to champion the Catholic diocese in Banja Luka and persuade the Pope to pay a visit there. This was part of our strategy to support the main three communities in Bosnia who were still at war with each other. First we had to penetrate the Vatican. Bishop Komarica gave us the name of a priest from Croatia who worked there. We also wanted to meet those with experience of intercultural work, academics and activists, as well as the head of an interfaith organization in Assisi who could advise us on this strategy.

ROME

In the eternal city, the architecture of late empire and fascism crushes the ruins of antiquity with a heavy tread. The once imposing edifices of the Coliseum and the Pantheon are rendered insignificant by miles and tonnage of late nineteenth and early twentieth century stone buildings. This is the city of the sadistic dictatorial police chief Scarpia, the vainglorious Mussolini, and Respighi's relentless and annihilating march of the legions. The bluster is epitomised in the memorial to Victor Emmanuel, a gigantic block of white stone, the size of a quarry, covered in imitation classical statuary and temple pillars. This impression of an icing-covered cosmic wedding cake is intended to be an apotheosis of the city's ancient history: glistening and magnetizing traffic from all directions.

However, at night, away from this glittering monument, the ancient ruins familiar from history books become the centre of attention, spot-lit and glowing modestly in their wounded classical glory.

The tsunami of modern age Roman architecture, macho and oppressive like those improbably muscled athletes on totalitarian monuments, not only reduces the great buildings of the past; it aims to nullify the overly emotional ornate baroque of renaissance churches: strangling them in a web of straight-lined bulky buildings stretching down long roads, in order to counter the sensual flowering of ancient and renaissance imagination with puritanical severity.

Music and cinema capture the extremes of Rome, the hedonistic sensuality alongside its cruel, pious authoritarianism. Puccini's police chief Scarpia crosses himself with one hand and sings the Te Deum, while stroking his crotch with the other in anticipation of raping the opera singer Tosca. Fellini opens *La Dolce Vita* with a visual joke: a crucifix appears to float over the city. In fact it is being carried behind a

plane to some destination, the Vatican maybe, to be put in place. Hedonistic sunbathers, enjoying la dolce vita below, pay no attention.

Anna Magnani was Mama Roma, the eponymous mother in Pasolini's film, striding down the street trading insults and greetings with passers by, friends, enemies, clients, anyone who happens to be there, her dark bruised eyes speaking of a life of abuse and oppression, but her manner defiant and unbeaten. Her son picks up with a young prostitute, a younger version of his mother, and, after being caught in the act of petty thieving, ends up dying, while shackled to a slab in a prison cell; the angle of the shot recalls Mantegna's corpse of Christ after being taken down from the cross. The film's title is ambiguous. The city is Magnani, or it is the actress who is the city. This feisty woman of ambition refuses to be defeated by whatever life throws at her, but fights in vain to improve conditions for herself and her son, who represents the sole purpose of her existence. On hearing of his death she rushes to the window, and is only just restrained from jumping to her death. Magnani's face stares angrily, defiantly and challengingly at the city, at us.

This actress launched herself in Rossellini's *Roma, Citta Aperta*, which deals with the final days of the Second World War and the murky politics of survival during a period of anarchy as the fascists retreat. They exact revenge and settle scores.

Magnani always represented an inextinguishable life force: a mixture of passion and decency. For this reason the closing frames of the film are particularly upsetting. She is fatally hit by a bullet fired from a receding police car which is carrying her lover away, and crumples lifeless on the street. It is as though the soul of Rome, everything human and worthwhile, has been callously destroyed, in the careless blink of an eye.

That generation of artists and film makers understood the crisis, the inevitable legacy of war. Ruins surround a defeated populace which has to re-erect both the infrastructure of life, and even more importantly, the humanity that the war

extinguished. Without this restoration of humanity, the rebuilding of houses, infrastructure and the economy is a vain endeavour.

The Castel del'Angelo on the bank of the River Tiber is visible from the roof of St Peter's in the Vatican City. Tosca's defiant cry as she leaps from the top to escape her pursuers: 'Avanti a Dio!' – 'Before God!' is a demand for justice, if not in this life, at least in the next one where, she has to believe, God alone has authority.

Over the wide expanse of St Peter's Square, people move like ants. Above them, sculptures of popes line the colonnades on either side of the basilica. All around the square, and in side streets radiating away in every direction, stand papal offices, the 'engine room of Catholicism,' according to Cardinal Newman. In the middle sits the Sistine Chapel where Michelangelo's buff bodies float naked and soar weightlessly and unencumbered through space.

In one of these offices sat Dr Akasheh. A large map on the wall behind him indicated the extent of Catholicism penetrating every corner of the world, but also of Islam matching this reach. Books and documents piled high on his desk as he sat silently, head in his hands, listening to us.

He represented Islam on the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, and naturally agreed that the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque was fair and just, that reconciliation must take place between all religions. We were surprised he had not heard of Bishop Komarica, and soon learnt that few people in Rome knew about the Banja Luka diocese and what happened there during the Bosnia War. The people in Rome were either ignorant or preferred not to remember.

The door kept opening with people interrupting our conversation, until Dr Akasheh ordered them to leave us in peace.

The meeting was not productive. He could make no decisions, or help in any way, because he needed authorization from his bosses, Bishop Fitzgerald and Cardinal Arenzi. We had made a mistake, arranging our visit to Rome without fixing to meet these important people. ‘I can’t give a final word,’ he excused himself.

He then advised us to make the project less pro-Islamic, and warned us to be aware of fanatics and extremists. Dr Ceric was not an easy man to deal with, he observed.

He then informed us of an inter-religious cemetery in Banja Luka where Christians and Muslims were buried together. We had come across no such phenomenon, and it occurred to us that Dr Akasheh did not know what he was talking about, or perhaps was thinking of another place, especially as earlier he seemed to have heard of neither Bishop Komarica nor Banja Luka. The conversation at this point became inconsequential.

Despite the grand title of Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, it seemed that this office was a gesture rather than the hub of any substantial activity. Dr Akasheh looked blankly at us for most of the meeting, waiting for us to leave.

POVERTY, SPIRIT AND INTELLECT

ST EGIDIO AND ST JEROME

The Trastevere is one of the oldest quarters of Rome, south of the Vatican, a place where traditionally foreigners came to settle. St Paul visited here. It had a friendly cosmopolitan feel to it, with narrow streets passing from one little square to another, small home-run restaurants and vines growing over pergolas.

Here we had productive meetings with the St Egidio Community.

The director could not attend the first meeting, because a strike by air controllers kept him in Brussels. We were taken into a courtyard, shaded by apricot trees, jasmine and vines, by a shy friendly man who spoke fluent English. Several banana trees also

spread their large succulent leaves, claiming space. These were a reminder of the community's work in Africa. We talked to Father Ianari and Mario Giro, who specialised in international relations.

A cannon suddenly boomed, a custom dating from the time of Pope Pius 9th to ensure that the church bells rang at the same time.

The St Egidio Community, numbering around forty thousand, consisted mainly of young people, directed by volunteers like Claudio Betti, who was an academic and business advisor. They worked with the poorest of the poor, living with them, sharing and helping to rebuild their lives. Africa, in particular Mozambique, took most of their time, energies and resources. Bosnia did not come high on their list of priorities, but they were curious about what we were trying to do, and were prepared to take part.

They began each project as humanitarian aid, bringing money and medicine to areas of need, then began developing educational projects focusing on peace as preached in the Gospels. 'Defeat poverty by defeating war' ran one of their slogans. Prayer was their first action, a means of bringing and holding the community together. Service to others and brotherhood were their central tenets.

Mario Giro understood the urgency for a truth and reconciliation commission in Bosnia but did not think it had chance of success for the time being. He told us that we could not depend on European interest. The European Union operated on 'stop and go' principles: finding quick closures to problems while underlying issues, political, social and economic, remained unsolved.

The St Egidio Community had already organized an inter-religious meeting with representatives from all over Bosnia, but no Bosnian Serbian Orthodox came. Cardinal Puljic and the Reis ul Ulema attended, but the meeting failed to produce a program in Bosnia. The community was interested in our work because they felt

Bosnia to be neglected, and had nothing but respect and admiration for our success with the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially bringing Bishop Jefrem to Coventry.

Next day we met Claudio Betti, who latched on to our proposal for setting up a St Egidio Community in Banja Luka to help the Catholics and other beleaguered minorities. This meant finding Catholic volunteers like the English-speaking man who had welcomed us the day before. They would set up a house, and be available for the communities in need there.

Though the St Egidio Community functioned as a non-hierarchical organization, Claudio Betti had such personality and charisma that it was impossible not to recognize him as the leader.

He took us around the narrow winding streets of Trastevere repeating what we had been told the day before, that, Africa and Aids being their chief challenge, they had no resources to spare to help finance our work.

He then admitted that Europe was building a tragedy in the Republika Srpska. He would invite Bishop Komarica to a meeting in September in Palermo, a gathering of two hundred religious leaders, Christian, Muslim and others. 'We need to be pushed into things,' he said, and added with a sigh: 'There are too few people doing too much.'

We entered the church of Santa Maria del Trastevere, where the St Egidio Community worshipped. The interior glowed with elaborate mosaics in the Byzantine style. But in contrast to the baroque extravagances of other churches in Rome, where gigantic male nudes were splayed, along with floating asexual angels and jumbles of fleshy naked boy cherubs, across large canvases that frame violent bloodbaths, crucifixions and tortures, Santa Maria del Trastevere depicted a sober medieval formality: rows of apostles and dignitaries.

Claudio Betti repeated to us the three basic rules of his community, which suited the serene simplicity of the church: prayer, service to the poor and fraternity.

‘Do not hesitate,’ he said, looking into the middle distance, pondering the consequences and responsibilities of being partners with us in Bosnia, and added: ‘Push us!’

As Claudio described how the community organized soup kitchens and educated gypsy children, a tiny beggar boy with a wide gap-toothed grin came up and rubbed against him like a cat. Claudio hugged him and ran a hand down the boy’s skinny back. ‘This is Titi. Let me introduce you!’ he exclaimed with delight at this encounter. Eyes black and expressive of life experience way beyond his tender years, the boy giggled and wriggled out of the big man’s embrace, running off only to reappear later and successfully beg coins of us. He might have leapt from a Caravaggio canvas, a grimy street urchin living off his wits, and whom the painter turned into a dangerous cupid or cherub, someone to be feared and kept at a distance.

Claudio Betti left us in a small square in Trastevere.

The Church in Rome flaunts its wealth. The affluent classes reckon that all is well with the world because survival is not their problem. At the same time they resent the demands made on them by the poor and troubled rest of the world. ‘We can’t help everybody!’ exclaim the rich. Gold, silver and the most expensive paintings and sculptures in the world fill the interiors of Rome’s baroque churches, turning them into jewelled shrines.

Outside, sit the beggars.

The transcendental opulence of St Peter’s silences everybody. There seems to be no limit to the expense and craftsmanship on display across walls, ceilings and floors. The sheer exaggerated ecstasy of the poses, sublimated Eros, made the gigantic sculpted saints, dressed as monks in attitudes of overwrought emotion, and naked

mythological figures tussling with muscle-bound devils, look banal. It is as though the artists' imagination failed them, and the stone resisted being transmuted into spirit, remaining heavily earthbound: blocks of grey stone.

In contrast to the surrounding hammy theatricality, Michelangelo's exquisitely proportioned young Madonna holding the dead son in her lap, resembling a husband, lover or brother, was a model of delicacy. The celebrated sculpture had recently suffered attack from a disturbed vandal, and it sat behind glass looking even more vulnerable.

Elsewhere in the monumental space of the basilica is another sculpture. Bernini manages to transmute a weighty piece of marble into airy fantasy. It echoes the sensuality of that sculptor's Teresa of Avila, to be found in another Roman baroque church, and which depicts an orgasmic encounter between the saint, her eyes closed and lips parted in an eternal gasp, and an angel, who observes the moment of climax with a smile of rapture.

Sex and religion: Roman Baroque churches express both simultaneously.

From the top of Michelangelo's dome, we saw all the roads leading fan-shaped to and from the Vatican City. More colossal statues stand round the parapet immediately beneath the dome: authoritarian popes, bishops and saints wielding crosses and croziers, looking severely down over the swarms of ant-like people in the square below.

The projects to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque and establish a civic forum in Banja Luka were closely linked. The first depended on the other for security. For this reason we wished to meet an academic with detailed knowledge of the relations between communities of different faiths, especially Christianity and Islam.

We found most academics to be unhelpful; at worst cynical and dismissive, at best expounding passionately held theories about the intractable political situation in Bosnia and the wickedness of the nationalists, implying how futile all our efforts were to bring about change. These academics generally knew little about the situation on the ground. Father Justo Lacunza-Balda turned out to be an exception. A specialist on Islam, he understood the nature of our work and advised us on numerous proposals, and how to make the best use of our staff and resources. His proposals inspired as well as daunted us, but we learned the importance of ‘respect’ between communities, and of taking pains to record history truthfully.

Books, papers, pictures and artefacts packed his study: a space for learning and creativity that reflected his open, questing mind. Light poured in from a large window as in Dürer’s 1514 engraving of St Jerome: the archetypal scholar. The sun’s radiance penetrates the darkest corners of the saint’s room, embracing every object, so that each book, piece of furniture, the lamp wrapped in a vine-branch, a sun hat on the wall, a time piece, comfy cushions, a skull on the windowsill, the dozing lion and small dog lying next to each other in the foreground, and the old man writing, can be seen in precise detail. Knowledge is illumination and harmony.

In Father Lacunza-Balda’s study, despite apparent disorder, everything had its place and was arranged with imagination and a sense of the importance of its position in the scheme of things. He could reach for any book of reference, knowing its exact location, and, during our meeting, took out several volumes relevant to our work without needing to search.

My great-aunt Fritzi’s flat in Vienna also gave the impression of being a disorganized jumble of pictures, photographs and books, although everything had its place: a treasure trove of history, art and literature, which reflected her joy in culture,

and an appreciation of its importance in life. She invited me regularly to stay during school holidays. My great aunt slept on a couch, which became a sofa during the day, and made up a camp bed for me next to it. We had meals and received guests in this one room; only a bathroom, a small kitchen and balcony providing separate spaces. We read to each other, and listened to the radio. My aunt, a retired headmistress, angrily denounced interviewers and politicians for their stupidity, only calming down during relays of concerts or operas. We talked late into the evening, snuggling down to sleep surrounded by the complete works of great writers, reproductions of old masters, and the darkness filled with memories and history.

Great-aunt Fritzi, youngest daughter of one of Vienna's most liberal rabbis during the last years of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, had known Freud and Adler personally, met Mahler and talked about the now famous artists of that time as friends. Formidable in intellect and character, having been raised in a cultured family of high achievers, and devoted to issues of social justice, she had first wanted to practise law, but eventually chose education. Her surgeon brother remarked: 'That was a good decision. As a lawyer you might have saved a few thieves, but as a head teacher you are rescuing generations.' The Second World War put paid to that. Then a middle-aged woman, she fled to England, staying with academic acquaintances in Oxford. Immediately after Germany's surrender she returned to Vienna to spend her remaining years in the city that, despite persecution and the destruction of the world that nurtured her, was her physical and spiritual home. Her room had survived the war, which killed so many family members, colleagues and friends. She picked up her life as though the war had been an irritating interruption, holding tenaciously to her belief that no political stupidity could entirely vanquish the spirit of humanity and common decency, or obliterate the beauty and wisdom of the work of artists, musicians and writers, however widespread the burning

and killing. Perhaps she could not bear to face the fact she may have failed one of those generations her brother talked about; but the room itself proved her right.

Vienna also gave easy access to her beloved Alps, where as a young woman she had been a keen rock climber. A photograph of her grasping an ice-pick in the Dolomites, showed muscular calves bulging above sturdy boots, and hung next to portraits of family and friends: the rabbi paterfamilias, stern, like Moses, with a long white beard, Freud and other famous faces, along with vividly coloured modernist landscape paintings, and reproductions of Dürer and Italian masters.

Everyone, including my parents, feared and respected her: a no-nonsense woman with a strong physique, even in her seventies, who made no attempt to ingratiate herself with anyone. She and I enjoyed a close, almost conspiratorial, connection: this tough and challenging elderly woman and a pasty clumsy boy, both united against her tedious cousins and their families, who had no interests apart from shopping and the next restaurant meal. Along with trenchantly expressed opinions on politics, society and art, matured over a long active life, she also handed on to me a foolproof method of cooking rice. It involved precisely measured quantities, one part American rice to two parts of water, bringing to the boil, then covering tightly with a thick cloth, the heat turned off. After swelling in the steam for an hour, and the cloth had been lifted, the rice was always perfectly cooked: the grains separate, risen in a smooth breast-like mound and smelling fragrant. Her tastes modest, most evenings we enjoyed sharing a wide shallow bowl of semolina pudding with honey drizzled over.

Once, after a particularly strenuous walk to a mountain hut in a remote Alpine valley, noticing my exhaustion, she whispered something to the farmer's wife who, minutes later and smiling broadly, placed a large dish of fresh whipped cream, sprinkled with sugar, in front of me. Love and pride in their eyes, they both watched me eat it slowly with a big spoon, an unforgettable moment. No cream since tasted as

good. That bowl breathed the essence of alpine meadows, and I could hear the cow snorting comfortingly in the stable nearby.

My great aunt appreciated my artistic pretensions, never criticising or commenting, except with an approving nod, constantly encouraging me to spend hours drawing and writing. She understood, like all good teachers, that it takes time and practice to develop. During the daytime she left me on my own to be creative in a little wooden cabin, surrounded by apple and plum trees: a kind of dacha. This rented summer house in the Vienna Woods stood a couple of miles walk from her flat in the Sievering district. Professionals would make use of these places over the weekend to escape the noise and dirt of the city.

And at twilight, when the city lights twinkled in the city below, I would walk back down the hill to her cosy flat. The room, full of books, art and history, was a distillation of ‘culture’: the word that used to make Hitler’s Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering reach for his gun.

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A treasury of records, memories, stories and thought filled Father Lacunza Balda’s room. Throughout our meeting he spoke insistently on the need to prevent the ‘rewriting of history’ and to ‘preserve the truth’. His study provided an example of one way to do this.

He took us to one corner where a small oriental carpet spread in front of three chairs, each with its own side table decorated with an attractive small lamp and candle.

Lean, tall, with long grey hair swept back, electric with intellectual zeal, Father Lacunza-Balda looked at us sharply. Photos propped against the bookshelves showed him to have been an athletic handsome young man. Age had not withered him. His fit physique, sharp mind and energy reminded me of my great-aunt.

He spoke fluent English, but amused us, unintentionally, with his opening greeting, 'When we apologized for taking up his time, he smiled in warm welcome and said: 'I have been suspecting you!' Then we sat down for juice, coffee and a lengthy discussion.

'History must be acknowledged. It cannot be cancelled out,' he told us. 'There *were* mosques. This is the plain truth. We have to set the record straight. All documentation is vital and essential.'

He suggested that one of the main tasks of our new office in Banja Luka should be to start a collection of documents, memories, books, pictures, and newspaper cuttings, all stored, copied and made available, in the form of exhibitions and a library.

'A second element is to ask for a Christian-Muslim statement,' he went on. 'There must be no condemnation. Mutual trust has to be built up. No official institutions should be involved, just photos published, with other voices from the arts. There are plenty of writers, scholars of Islam who work in this field. Build the foundations. The media will soon pick up the idea.'

We discussed our plans for a series of lectures on 'Respect', which would encourage sensible dialogue between the communities, and end the cycle of mutual, childish recriminations, leaders tiresomely accusing each other of being either 'fascist Serbs' or 'terrorist Muslims'.

'Be aware of what the Orthodox represents for Islam,' Father Lacunza-Balda warned. 'Be sensitive. Don't exploit relations between different Christian groups. Avoid the Russian Orthodox Church. We are not sure where they stand at the moment. Attend to the issue of how Muslims create their identity in the West. Cathedrals and main mosques should be on an equal footing. The Orthodox Churches are different in each country. In Greece they are the official Church of the government. In Macedonia the Orthodox are preoccupied with their relations with

Islam, because of the closeness of neighbouring Kosovo and Albania. The Orthodox Churches also have problems amongst themselves.’

He advised against visiting the Orthodox-Islam Centre in Lebanon because the lack of funding prevented it functioning.

‘There is too big a gap in Europe between Muslims and the natives of their host countries,’ he continued. ‘The common denominators include the problem of identity. There is the black hole of the Balkans, and also the barrier of language. English is spoken a little; German less so.’

In a short space of time Father Lacunza-Balda had outlined the fundamental problems. I warmed to his approach to history, the need to chronicle, to value the facts, as opposed to myths, and to understand the relationships between communities, in all the complexity of their self-interests and priorities. He spoke like a present-day Pimen, the monk from Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov*.

We discussed the creation of spaces for Bosnian communities to study their history in exhibitions, libraries, arts and crafts centres, and the need to attend to the relationship between rural and urban communities: how to measure and identify perceptions of each other. Father Lacunsa-Balda insisted: ‘Legacy is vital: preserving records. The diabolic madness of destroying art and libraries is like setting fire to your own home.’

Describing the vision behind the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque as being about the imagination, we asked for his advice about Christian-Islamic collaboration.

‘Don’t mix symbols,’ he warned; then spoke about Afghanistan: ‘For an exhibition we looked for specific artefacts. People need to know that books are being published, photos taken, and that contemporary history is important. We established an Education for Peace project with a map of various parts of the world, which corresponds to present reality, constantly updated, checked and corrected.’

‘We must put the past right for the present,’ Donald commented.

‘Rebuilding also rebuilds trust,’ continued Father Lacunza-Balda. ‘The question about Bosnia is: is it a tragedy that is upsetting the balance of ethnic groups and people in just that one place, or is it Europe? The Balkans is after all Europe. It is right next door to us! Indifference is not an option. We must constantly ask the governments in Europe: What are you doing? Europe invested in Yugoslavia after Tito’s death. Italy provided 46% of telecommunications. We must discover and chronicle concrete facts of what happened in the Balkans in recent history. Building a safe area in the Balkans is building a safer and better Europe. Trust is important. Evil deeds and facts must be placed in the limelight. Good questions need to be asked: who you are, your identity is important. Then there is the whole matter of corruption and crime. Kosovo is the first area in the world for smuggling cigarettes. What about Serbia and Bosnia? There is constant and lucrative drug traffic between Afghanistan and Europe through Kosovo. In the year 2000, over two thousand, two hundred and twenty three tons of drugs were known to pass through. Who transported them? Who facilitated this operation? Don’t tell me it was just the Taliban. Europe simply condemns: “They are evil and wrong! They are fundamentalists! We are right!” But the Taliban cultivate the drugs because of the European market. There are close connections we cannot ignore. The Taliban is reorganizing. After eight months of bombing, the Taliban has apparently been dismantled. Is this really so? What really happened? Politics are responsible. These are not just problems about religion. And then there is the issue of Bosnian minefields. Is this civilization? Is this respect for human rights? We live in a house of glass, and danger is apparently always coming from somewhere else!’

‘Go to NATO headquarters in Brussels,’ suggested Father Lacunza-Balda. ‘Ask what NATO can do today to change its image. It should not only be a military, but

also a humanitarian organization. Talk to Chris Donnelly. He is asking how he can get involved in the kind of work you are doing. They are becoming a new body, not just a rapid-force intervention agency. They need to get involved in real projects to redirect their resources. In Afghanistan we have had enough of planes and bombs. They should bring books and schooling; look for more human projects. Go to the European Community for inter-cultural dialogue in Europe. Go to the Council for European Churches, talk to Hans Voeking. We want to reconstruct records as homage to history, and don't emphasise just the religions.'

He then described his own work: 'We train people in Christian-Muslim relations. We teach languages and cultural history. There are introductory courses on general knowledge of Islam. We have a library of thirty thousand books and magazines. We invest in computers, websites etc., in all languages so everyone can consult them. The White Fathers, missionaries in Africa, fund us but we are perpetually fund-raising. For thirty years I have trained in languages and culture, worked with the media: teaching, tutoring, editing annual publications, collegial work, translating into French and Italian. Now religious organizations realize the importance of inter-religious issues, so they help to raise money too.'

We ended the meeting with a repetition of, and emphasis on, the importance of history. 'History has to be told as it is,' he said again. 'Politicians and corrupt people are forever rewriting history. The method is to collect news cuttings, record what people are saying, their stories, their memories, their experiences. We need to build up an aural tradition. Avoid relying only on Microsoft and computers. Information can be lost. Record it the following way: In 2002, so and so went to this particular mosque – name it – in such and such a place. Facts, not ideology are important. Collect coins, artefacts, photos, fragments of Muslim rosaries, date them, and write where they come

from. Don't be dependent on enslaving computers. Avoid them at the beginning. Use lined cards. Collect and place in a safe archive.'

Donald added: 'When we collect this information we must always ask the questions: Why do you weep? What are you mourning? What is going on?'

We did not want to leave Father Lacunza-Balda. His room was a haven: so many books to consult, pictures to look at, questions to ask, facts to learn.

In comparison, the Vatican office of Catholic-Islamic Relations, with Dr Akasheh sitting impotently at his desk piled with missives and files, had been intimidating: the gigantic map of the world dominating the space turned it into a war-strategy room rather than a place of understanding.

Our train to Assisi left Rome and crossed the plains of Lazio, where deep-green cypress groves frame pastel-coloured cornfields, then wound its way through the wooded and rocky valleys of Umbria, passing small towns and villages on its way to Ancona.

The name Ancona appears in the final song of Hugo Wolf's *Italian Song Book*. A woman taunts her suitor with an outrageous list of other lovers in the region: one in Penna, another on the plain of Maremma, one in Ancona, a fourth one in Viterbo, another in Casentino, one in her hometown, another in Maggione, as many as four in La Fratta and finally all of ten in Castiglione. After a fraction of a second's pause for the revelation to sink in, the piano, not the singer, bursts into a peal of defiant, liberating and hysterical laughter.

Ancona is now a port to which refugees from the Balkans keep coming to find warmer welcome, westward across the Adriatic, rather than northward, where fortress Europe keeps them out with more determined efficiency than the Italians.

The medieval town of Assisi stands on the hillside, separate from and above the commercial area round the station. An earthquake in 1997 had shaken the foundations, and brought several walls tumbling down, but otherwise everything looked as it had for centuries. The buildings baked in the summer heat, and looked over tiers of orange tiled roofs across the valley, to an escarpment, which can be recognized as the landscape background to murals by renaissance painters in the local churches. In this town, St Francis once stood and stripped himself of his clothes. By this symbolic act he renounced materialism and launched a challenge to the Catholic Church. The saint blamed the Church for choosing temporal power, and acquisitiveness, over the more modest life as described in the words of Jesus in the New Testament.

St Francis's challenge both disturbed and inspired the Church. No one could deny his honesty or faith. In the woods and hills of La Verna, not far from Assisi, it is still possible to see the rock where St Francis prayed, and visitors can sense the degree of hardship and self-denial. After he died, the extensive building of sumptuous churches, to honour his memory and teachings, seemed to imply compensation for doubt and guilt. St Francis could not have been an easy man to follow.

'This is my battlefield,' announced Father Mizzi with a smile, stretching his arms, and looking around his neatly ordered study. The priest-monk had established a centre for inter-religious dialogue over the last four decades, initiating the idea long before it became fashionable, or had even been taken into consideration that Christians should talk with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and all other faiths. What began as a series of friendships between Father Mizzi and people from all over the world who visited Assisi had now received the blessing of Pope John Paul. Despite his reputation and growing network of friends Father Mizzi still ran the centre on his own, relying on voluntary help from such people as the cheerful and enthusiastic Danish Catholic

woman, and her computer-literate son, who opened the door when we arrived and showed us to our rooms.

Father Mizzi had been the first to respond to our letter, which solicited support for our work in Bosnia. Even if he could not help in any practical way his reputation attracted attention from every direction as far afield as Japan.

Photographs on display showed Father Mizzi with the Pope, the Dalai Llama, Mother Theresa, Yasser Arafat and various Hindu leaders. Shelves were covered with Orthodox icons, Buddhist dolls, Japanese scrolls, Indian miniatures, small statues of Shiva, Jewish candlesticks, woolly toy animals, puppets, candles, and chalices ranged round a modestly carved, but large wooden cross. A vase of flowers stood on the table and a fresh breeze blew in through the windows, that looked across the valley to the escarpment so familiar from old paintings.

Just as Patriarch Pavle's blessing of Donald marked the beginning of our projects, the encounter with Father Mizzi represented another blessing.

Despite growing older and greyer after forty three years of service in Assisi, his eyes still retained their youthful lustre. Father Mizzi wore a grey cassock with a white cord.

He himself needed help. As secretary-general of the order he did not have enough support or friends to help with the work expected of him. The Japanese Association, Rissho Kosei-Kai, with a lay organization of six and a half million, was establishing links between Assisi and Kyoto. This project involved building an inter-religious centre on a large plot of land, on which temples, mosques and churches, representing all the world's religions, would be built, and where international dialogue conferences could be held for up to eight thousand guests. The scale of this theme park and conference centre reminded me of those communist party events in the Soviet Union, at which thousands of representatives across the communist world, from west to east,

north to south, gathered in mega-halls listening to the Leader, and cheered unanimously. Father Mizzi suggested we might persuade a branch of Rissho Koseikai, based in Oxford England, to become our partners.

He looked at us gravely and sympathetically, knowing the problems we were bound to face and having struggled along this same bramble path for over forty years, wanted to encourage us with love and prayers. Our hours with him became an unexpectedly refreshing interlude, like coming across an oasis in a desert.

He told us about the Millennium Summit Peace Meeting at the United Nations, and complained about a Hindu leader, a belligerent swami, who spoiled the atmosphere by claiming the organization was out to proselytise. 'I cannot sit down with non-peace people,' Father Mizzi declared.

His hour of international fame came when Pope John Paul asked him to organize an inter-religious peace meeting of all the world's religious leaders in Assisi. Photographs of the event showed Robert Runcie, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, walking down the narrow streets of the medieval town, next to the Pope and surrounded by Orthodox bishops, Muslim muftis and other religious leaders of every colour, shape and size. Since then, the organization had grown but Father Mizzi still worked by himself, and was expected to run the centre, accommodate guests, and host meetings and discussions.

He acknowledged the numerous honours heaped on him, including the nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, pleased in a child-like way. He spoke of uninterrupted ecumenical work over the last twenty years and told us how it started. Some Anglican Franciscans had come with a group of Scandinavian Lutherans to Assisi as tourists, and met with Father Mizzi. They invited him back to the UK and Scandinavia, and, from then on, he forged links of friendship across the globe. The Japanese discovered that the Buddhist monasteries in Kyoto, also founded by reformers and men of prayer,

had been established at the time of St Francis in the thirteenth century. Considering this coincidence to be a ‘beautiful mystery’, the Japanese wanted to strengthen spiritual and practical links between the two sacred places.

After the meeting, we walked to the basilica dedicated to St Francis. Houses, streets and people were bathed in Italian sun. This radiance intensifies colours evenly across the spectrum, so distant landscapes are not hidden in a haze, but are as vivid as close up, like in a dream.

The paintings of Cimabue and Giotto that cover the interior of the basilica in Assisi also filled my childhood. Small reproductions decorated the walls of my bedroom, reflecting my mother’s taste, and provided my visual arts education. So I grew up with the animated flap of small golden angel’s wings in cerulean skies, while smooth, blemish-free Madonna faces gazed perpetually down on me with kindly, tranquil expressions, but also disturbingly blank, like sheets of empty paper.

Later, as a historian, I learnt about the background against which these paintings were created: times of perpetual warfare, famine and pestilence, and therefore the constant proximity of extreme suffering and death. So these images of celestial harmony were a vision far removed from brutish reality: a dream of intense longing, also heard in contemporary polyphony, and witnessed in the grandeur of cathedrals, that rose defiantly out of squalor and poverty.

Surrealist painters explored similar territory of fantasy with matching psychological insight, but few achieved the intensity shared by these early Renaissance artists: a vision that grew out of a longing for transcendence, and a necessity to make life bearable.

Now, walking down the hill to the basilica, the light and landscape showed me how the artists put what they saw everyday into their painting, as though to declare that

however awful human beings made lives for themselves, nature itself was not to blame: that their vision of divine harmony existed in the faces of people, the sloping hills, the rustling trees, flitting birds and running streams.

The renaissance took its name from a return to classical art and thinking, but like St Francis's teaching about basic needs, a simpler life, and better relations between people, it also represented a fresh acknowledgement of our basic humanity.

Cimabue's fantastical landscapes teem with angels, saints, nativities, crucifixions and last judgements, and conceived on a grand scale. Simone Martini's brightly coloured contemporary interpretations of bible stories are depicted as everyday events.

Towering above them, Giotto's series of large frescoes, around the nave of the basilica, illustrate the life of St Francis. They revolutionised not only painting technique, but also how artists perceived and understood reality. The characters are life-size, and in proportion to each other, rounded, shaded, and set against a mostly naturalistic perspective of buildings, landscapes, and receding horizons.

St Francis is a modest figure. He does not dominate. His scale is human, but kinder, wiser and better than the rest of us. The halo sets him apart.

This was probably why my mother hung these paintings round my bed, except the miniature size of the reproductions gave me no sense of the grandeur, and therefore overwhelming, humanity of the originals.

My favourite has always been the fresco to be found on the right-hand west wall of the Basilica. It shows St Francis preaching to the birds, each painted with scrupulous attention to detail, the creatures ruffling their feathers, not keeping still, hopping about, fluttering and covering ground and branches. A monk stands large next to the saint, who is depicted in side view, talking and gesturing at the birds. The fellow monk looks out of the picture as much as to say: 'This man is out of his mind!'

PENETRATING THE VATICAN

We returned to Rome and embarked on the tricky operation of entering the Vatican offices, to find out why the people there were so unwilling to help and support the Catholic diocese of Banja Luka..

Bishop Komarica had given us the name of Petar Rajic, a Croat who used to be one of his students at the seminary, and had now been appointed personal secretary to the number three man at the Vatican, concerned with internal affairs. At least Petar Rajic knew Bishop Komarica. Everyone else we met in Italy had not heard of the bishop, and claimed to know nothing of what had happened in the Banja Luka diocese.

Petar Rajic's office was inside the spacious Vatican palace, next door to the Pope's private quarters.

The expected heavy security came in the form of the Pope's private army: the Swiss Guards, dressed in operetta costumes. At the first gate stood an exceptionally tall lanky adolescent next to a short one, both in floppy hats and tights, and striped plus fours under brightly-coloured and embroidered jackets. Despite their comical appearance they behaved like Cerberus at the entrance to Hades. After some mobile phoning, they let us through, and we walked down corridors, across courtyard, and up marble staircases, at each corner encountering more Swiss Guards. Apart from the chief guard, who had his own desk in one of the corridors facing the final courtyard on the way to the Pope's quarters, they were teenagers who might have been on vacation. The chief guard was only a few years older, but his over-developed muscles and manners of a night-club bouncer, made his elaborate costume even more incongruous. He belonged in dark glasses and a tight-fitting black suit.

As we approached Petar Rajic's office, a guard, looking like Billy Bunter with floppy blond hair, and wearing a moth-eaten costume, crept suddenly from behind an arras, which could have been a secret door. It seemed we had interrupted him in some

private activity. Flustered, he took several minutes to identify us on a sheet of paper, and, after more mobile phoning, we were ushered into a small windowless ante-office: a space just for three people to sit.

We waited.

The Vatican offices consist of a warren of corridors and small rooms, lined with wall panels behind which people can listen or spy. Centuries of political intrigue have taken place here, reputations made and lost, whispered plotting, back-stabbing and power-mongering: perhaps even acts of violence. The monumental, and sumptuously decorated, corridors had been painted by the best artists in renaissance Rome, but the cubicle where we sat had been hung with recent religious pictures, the cheaply-framed work of enthusiastic amateurs. These had been presented to the Pope on his visits around the world, or had been gifts from Catholic admirers, and stowed away in pokey rooms like this.

The proximity of these primitive labours with the masterpieces of Raphael and Michelangelo belongs to a Catholic tradition that can be seen in churches across Europe, where the artistic gifts of untutored worshippers hang alongside the work of professionals. Such amateur outpourings of creativity usually coincided with miraculous visions of the Virgin Mary. The intensity of their expression of gratitude, longing, despair and need, made the refined work of experienced and more talented artists in these churches look coldly pompous and vapidly melodramatic. In Mariazell, a small town in the mountains of South East Austria, the corridors around the main church are packed from floor to ceiling with such paintings, all depicting the appearance of the Virgin Mary at a time of crisis, illness or accident. The image is not of a woman, but a depiction of the church's elaborately dressed and jewelled statue of the Madonna. She appears in each painting as a distant apparition, shaped like a teacosy. This is not meant to denigrate these artists' work. The pictures truthfully reflect

the way people in extreme suffering experience her divine intervention: something second-hand. Believing the statue itself has the power to help them these artists can not imagine the Madonna in any other way, not even as a human being: a woman, a mother, someone recognizable, familiar and therefore immediate.

In this airless Vatican cubicle, the paintings are not on the level of the unique treasure of folk art in Mariazell. They do not tell stories about everyday life of poor people barely surviving lives of extreme hardship. These more recent paintings copy traditional Christian images: limp figures on crosses, and mothers with babies. They are executed with limited technique and in primary colours.

In 1972 I painted the Stations of the Cross for St Peters Church in Morden: an attempt at making the familiar scenes of the events leading to the crucifixion contemporary, and reflecting the life of the people in the parish. They upset a number of people including some critics. A subsequent vicar took them to a Consistory Court. They only escaped destruction because the artist Leonard Rosoman, the theologian The Revd John Druty, and most significantly the parishioners gave such a spirited defence that the judge, realizing that whatever the critics said the people understood and valued the paintings.

My Stations of the Cross did not belong to the tradition of church art which developed from the late renaissance, carrying on over the centuries from Raphael to Gill. Nor were they part of the folk art tradition of Mariazell, although I intended to express that vivid earthy vision. For all its criticism, my work did not lack sophistication. All my life I studied and still study the past: from Giotto and the surreal fantasies of late medieval religious painters, such as the daring iconoclasm of Grünewald and his contemporaries, artists who emerged from the civil unrest and wars of the Reformation. This art had its roots in current events and suffering, not in a dogmatic theological fantasy. It took into account war, illness, poverty, and untimely

death, as experienced by people of the day. I also found my inspiration in 20th century artists, eclectics like Stanley Spencer and confrontational Francis Bacon, not the cautious piety of contemporary traditionalists.

The pictures in the Vatican cubicle reminded me of the work of pensioners who attended my Workers Education for Adults art classes. They arrived with small canvases, and wanted me to teach them how to paint chocolate box covers: dream landscapes and flowers. Instead I encouraged them to develop their own style and vision and, finding this more fun and rewarding, they rapidly produced original and arresting work: idiosyncratic, powerful and moving. One pensioner, Olive Harrison, painted the same tree in picture after picture. It became her mantra. No one criticized each other's work, so no one pointed out to her that trees did not look like that. Her trees were totemic triangles, beginning from a wide base, and tapering into the sky with a few leaves on the top. Perhaps they weren't trees at all. Her pictures had the force of Easter Island statues with their mysterious faces hewn from large bits of stone. Proud of her paintings, she hung them round the house. The people who gave the Vatican their work had wanted, like Olive Harrison, to paint acceptable traditional images. I would like to have helped them discover their own vision, as original and remarkable as Olive Harrison, the pensioner, who once lived on the St Helier Estate in Morden, a member of that generation of Bingo-playing elderly women in sensible coats and hats, seen regularly at bus-stops, and to whom no one pays attention.

That my pictures at St Peters Morden have disappeared, possibly destroyed, meant that they belonged to a specific time, place and people. The main disappointment for me is that I failed to paint them so they could speak across the ages.

The modest offerings to the Pope in the pokey cubicle saddened me, because the artists yearned to liberate their vision, but no one helped them. However, the

expensive tapestries that covered the walls of the corridors in the Vatican depressed me more: the abundance of skill did not communicate either with the heart or spirit.

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After a while a door in our Vatican cubicle opened to what seemed a private corridor, and the junior Vatican diplomat Petar Rajic appeared. Though he had agreed to meet us, it became immediately clear he had only done so out of a feeling of duty to Bishop Komarica. The meeting became stilted. He listened to us, and suggested we contact the Papal Nuncio in Sarajevo.

Quickly I realized that the Vatican officials were embarrassed about the Balkans. Supporting Bishop Komarica meant opening the can of worms of perennially bad relations between Catholics and Orthodox as well as Muslims. Then there was the terrible history: massacres on both sides, going back to the Second World War, when Catholics slaughtered Orthodox, and in the Bosnian War, when Croats matched the Serbs in attacks against Muslims: Catholic atrocities being forgotten, while the world concentrated its outrage on the Serb Orthodox community. Bishop Komarica's diocese was paying for the crimes of Catholics, who, across Europe, presented him with awards, hoping no one would ask specific questions about their part in the war. Peter Rajic, a Croat, would feel this embarrassment more acutely than other Catholics in the Vatican. This ambitious priest planned to rise in the ranks, and told us that he hoped to be a papal nuncio himself one day.

The insulated world of the Vatican seemed as remote as England from the plight of Catholics in the Banja Luka diocese, though Bosnia is only an hour's flight from Rome. Extremity of violence causes not only shock but shame: shame that people can commit such atrocities, people not unlike us. Whether in Rome or a small town in England, it is easier to be insulated, from the facts and not be reminded of them.

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Films about the Bosnian conflict win awards: *No Man's Land*, *Welcome to Sarajevo* and *Beautiful People*. They treat the appalling subject matter obliquely in order to throw the horror of that war into relief by suggestion and use black humour. *Welcome to Sarajevo* deals with the rescue of children from a hospital, but it is the sudden death by a sniper's bullet of a handsome male lead that makes the strongest impression: a senseless sacrifice of youth and beauty. A less garlanded film, *Savior*, faces the facts of war full on, not turning away from the casual and extreme violence, forcing us to see what actually happened, in all its bloody awfulness: the kicking of pregnant women to make them abort their Muslim babies; the animal squeals of an old woman when a soldier hacks her finger cut off so he can take her ring; the fear, the sense of abandonment, and the procession of victims who, one after the other, cannot escape being slaughtered by grinning soldiers relishing their grisly task. The gratuity of the violence reflects the reality of what happened all over Bosnia in the war, and was carried out mostly by Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats against Muslims.

Savior is the story of an American mercenary, who initially fights on the side of the Serbs. Appalled by their brutality, he stops. He then rescues a new-born baby, half Muslim, half Serb: the result of a rape suffered by the Muslim woman he is helping but cannot save. It is distressing to watch this film.

Violence is gratuitous, whether on film or in reality. *Savior*, made by Predrag Antonijevic in 1998, three years after the war ended, makes the point that portraying the reality of violence raises the uncomfortable but inevitable question: how can we tolerate it? Hitchcock felt the need to examine acts of violence in all their sickening intimacy. The act itself, not our reaction to it, is the horror. The gory shower scene that takes place halfway through *Psycho* and the sickeningly clumsy death by gas oven early in *Torn Curtain* threaten to unbalance those films. How can we carry on watching the films? But in each case the minutely observed act becomes the motor for

the rest of the film, and challenges the audience to consider the consequences. The shock focuses our attention, and we are compelled to follow the unfolding of events to their conclusion. Hitchcock shows us how in his films, as in life, the consequences of appalling acts of violence can have no satisfactory resolution. They sear and haunt us, regardless of trial and punishment.

Documentaries show the aftermath of violence. Anything more direct is impermissible, because the victims are unable to approve the chronicling of their final agony. The publication of photos of people jumping to their deaths from the Twin Towers on 9:11 was considered immoral. *The Act of Killing* shows Indonesian former death-squad leaders gleefully describing how they carried out their mass-killings. This 2012 film focuses disturbingly on murderers: dead victims are voiceless.

In a feature film, a skilful director can challenge us to understand the nature of violence. On the one hand there is the danger of it being viewed as a form of pornography: an intimate act that titillates. However, treating the subject obliquely can also be a way of insulating, rather than just protecting, us from reality. *Savior* succeeds by shocking rather than entertaining us, which is why it has not enjoyed the kudos of other award-winning films about the Bosnia War. The main character is a reluctant hero. Being a mercenary, he does not earn our admiration. He takes the baby impulsively under duress; then struggles to cope with the consequences, and survives as best he can in a world turned to hell. The promise of a more tolerant future, symbolized by the mixed-race baby, is a fragile hope. The war is not over.

No place feels more insulated against the world of atrocities than the interior of the Vatican.

Petar Rajic hoped to close the meeting smoothly with a polite speech thanking us for our 'care of Catholics' in Banja Luka.

However this galvanized Donald into a response which would have positive consequences.

‘It isn’t for me, a retired Anglican priest, to sort out the problems in one of your dioceses,’ he said with a force that came as a surprise to Petar Rajic. ‘You have to take responsibility. This is what I came to the Vatican to say. The diocese of Banja Luka is in despair. You have to help them.’

Petar Rajic looked relieved when we left, so we hesitated asking him to take us privately to the Sistine Chapel, the one place in the Vatican I wanted to visit. He would probably have refused.

The intimidating Swiss Guard bouncer was so outraged when I suggested nipping down the corridor to take a peek at Michelangelo’s ceiling and *Last Judgement*, that he scowled and rose from his table, ordering me to go at the set opening time, and pay for my ticket, like everyone else.

So we left Rome without seeing the sensual celebration of naked, vulnerable humanity which decorates the private chapel of the Pope.

THE VIKING LONG BOAT

NORWAY VISIT 2002

A person is a person through other people

Graham Dyson, director of Conflict Crisis Management, worked from offices in Oslo. His world wide contacts, after years of experience as a lawyer in South Africa, working closely with Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, made him a significant person to visit and get on board. His advice, help and cooperation would help with our project to establish a civic forum and rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka.

The meetings in Norway would clarify our thinking about the purpose of a civic forum: kindling the spark of democracy.

The pricey standard of living in Norway would deter most visitors. Coffee rarely costs less than £3 a cup; and a small bottle of water the same. Alcohol was prohibitively expensive. ‘Norwegians pay for their future health care every time they drink,’ Graham Dyson told us with a twinkle. Meals cost more than accommodation. On the other hand everywhere in Oslo lay close to hand, a city compactly and attractively laid out with parks and fountains. We needed no bus or taxi and could walk across the city wherever we had to go.

ON VIKINGS AND IBSEN

A statue of Ibsen gazes thoughtfully over the square in front of the National Theatre, the most striking building in the city. The playwright’s forensic dissection of social hypocrisies, repressions, and corruptions prefigure issues that exploded in the liberation movements of the next hundred years. The pared-down style of his later plays is reflected in Oslo’s lack of bombastic public monuments, and a plain-speaking, undemonstrative people who keep their passions in check.

Ibsen also wrote the exuberantly cinematic *Peer Gynt*, which carries the audience across the world as well as to imagined places. The play reflects a tradition of exploration and questing going back over a thousand years, to the time of the Vikings. These entrepreneurs spread the influence of their comparatively sparsely populated country across the world in every direction, as far south as Sicily and, it is likely, also to the Americas, long before Columbus.

The long boat represented the height of Viking ambition: a sleek, efficient and sufficient form of transport. These Norsemen had modest needs, but they devoted

time and skill on carving and decoration. What constituted their main tool for survival became also a work of art.

Centuries later, Ibsen explored the perennial issue of people selling out to wealth, power and success at the cost of imagination and the joy of creative freedom. *The Master Builder* evokes memories of the long boat, which symbolically held these two ingredients for a fulfilled life in balance: the needs of the body and spirit. Society develops to the extent that these aims separate and pull poles apart. Ibsen points out the cost for human beings: the stronger their personalities, the more tragic the consequences of this separation. Death or suicide becomes the only alternative to lives wrecked by issues beyond resolution. However, his dramas are not pessimistic. They offer an alternative: a call to adventure. They examine opportunities which the Vikings seized and put into practice for several centuries, while Europe was allegedly in the grip of the Dark Ages. The end of *The Dolls House*, when Nora leaves her husband, resonates positively. As well as famously slamming shut, the door also opens on to a life full of possibilities for her.

The Vikings settled everywhere they travelled and traded, so Norwegians became assimilated in many parts of the world. Norwegians turned their country into one of the wealthiest nations. The small population had blood links across the world. This might explain why Norwegian humanitarian projects, like the Nansen Dialogue Centres, are established in many countries. Prosperous Norway is committed to international charity.

‘Don’t push anonymity,’ Graham Dyson advised, getting straight down to business as soon as we arrived, and firmly grasping the thorny issue of truth and reconciliation in Bosnia. ‘Don’t play into the authority paradigm.’ I had no idea what he was talking about. However I understood that he would help us develop methods of public

storytelling. He then spoke about ‘regional potential’ and a ‘ministry of traditional justice’ in America. He said he wanted to move away from the South African ‘road show’ and needed to ‘prioritise’. He warned us that the Norwegian Ministry of Defence would not support our program. Lawyers and police discouraged our kind of initiative, because these professionals were constantly being given blank cheques, and did not want interference from NGOs like ours, which encouraged alternative forms of dealing with problems. He said that we should be ‘future guys’ and ‘flesh out opportunities.’

Graham Dyson, a handsome, fit man, who looked much younger than his years, cheered us with his energy, fast-talking, shooting-from-the hip intelligence and passion. Like Donald he was impatient for change, for things to happen. And like Donald he was always being hampered by officialdom, having to raise money, deal with people who thought slowly, and were frightened to act. He saw himself as a ‘reconstructed’ male and preferred to run an office where everyone had an equal say; however, his dynamism prevented him from being anything less than the big chief.

‘Building the mosque as a focal point: it’s provocative,’ he said. ‘We like it! Put us in on any level of your project.’ He then talked about the Nansen Dialogue Centre, whose representatives we had met in Banja Luka with the hope of collaborating on projects. They had resources: a house, a meeting room, computers, equipment and, above all, generous funding. ‘Nansen looks to us for direction,’ he said. ‘Jo Sletback, who is director of the West Balkan desk of the Foreign Office here, knows about you. They are interested in going beyond dialogue.’

We began to work on a funding proposal. ‘Just say the issue will be dealt with in the context of guilt,’ said Graham Dyson. ‘Don’t try to reinvent the wheel, connect with the process; do a survey. Find out what happened to truth. There should be a pilot

phase; a focus on some people from South Africa coming over: a first group. I'm sufficiently cynical to know that this matters to funders.'

Reinventing the wheel is part of all creative activity, because each situation is different and going back to basics is part of the process. The experiences of people in South Africa, Northern Ireland, East Timor and Bosnia may suggest similarities of post-conflict traumas and issues of justice, but in fact the places do not share the same histories, and therefore the problems, by their nature, require different solutions.

Graham was right to say that funders feel more secure when the peace process has links with places where progress is seen to be made, and much can be learnt from various situations, however different. The important factor is always the people. We learnt, wherever we went, that they alone can decide, and then create frameworks for dealing with issues of trauma and justice. We could only offer support, advice, and be mediators: without such mediation the people would have difficulty even meeting.

'I'm in uncharted waters,' said Donald. 'Who am I pitching these proposals at?'

Graham kept up the flow of ideas and suggestions: 'Say: this is what we are going to do. We are connecting the mosque idea contextually to the truth and reconciliation process. Some work has been done. It has not succeeded, but is urgently necessary.

Say: we are not in competition with The Hague. Say: we are a complementary process. Say: South Africa should be involved in a series of events about learning and sharing in Banja Luka and Mostar, to revive the notion of story telling. Say: it is a containable project, not too expensive. Then you must carpet bomb everyone: the British Foreign Office, the Canadian Peace-keeping Fund, Roundtree...'

Graham promised to sharpen up Donald's proposal which should be punchy and presented in four distinct parts: projects, needs, resources and budget. Graham planned to come to Bosnia with us to widen his own projects beyond Kosovo and Macedonia. He told us to cooperate with and use the Nansen staff there. Nebucar in

Sarajevo was talented. Vladimir in Mostar was a pc genius, but one other was useless (a 'narcoticised giraffe'), and we should encourage Tanja in Banja Luka. However he thought the Nansen people were 'swimming about in vagueness', because the various groups were run independently, spending too much of the time being democratic and needing to sharpen their objectives.

Archbishop Tutu might be persuaded to 'pop in' and add extra weight to our project.

Whatever we might or might not achieve from our time in Norway, Graham Dyson had already made our visit worthwhile. He infected us with enthusiasm, and invigorated us with strategies.

Sig Utne, head of the Inter-Church Council of the Church of Norway, occupied a room on a middle floor of Church House. This Viking looked at us steadily, and said he had already worked with the Serbian Orthodox Church on links with Norway. Metropolitan Nikolaj had made a special visit in 1998, to appeal for funds to repair the cathedral roof in Sarajevo. We thought of all the buildings in that city destroyed by the besieging Serb army, and were struck by the irony at the possibility of the cathedral roof being damaged accidentally by Serb shells. Stig Utne said that the bishop of Oslo and Dr Cerić were also in close touch, through the World Council of Religion and Peace. Telling him that we found the World Council of Religion and Peace in Sarajevo to be unhelpful brought the conversation to a halt.

Stig Utne balked at projects. He could only give moral support to our proposals for truth and reconciliation, partnership forums, and seminars. However he showed some interest in our work with the Orthodox Church, and was prepared to offer hospitality to Bishop Jefrem's priests, an idea the bishop was steadfastly rejecting. However we were persistently determined to change his mind, however vain the hope.

We then talked about Brussels, and he recommended we visit Keith Clements, the director of CEC, the Conference of European Churches, whom we had already met. We remembered the pokey office overshadowed by the giant greenhouse of the European Parliament, where the real power lay, and how we had talked with Keith Clements in a dark, dingy room, seated on old sofas. Though kind and friendly, Keith Clements informed us that he lacked funds, and was in no position to help us.

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Next day we spent a desultory hour in Church House, with several representatives of the Norway Inter-Faith Council, as distinct from the Inter-Church Council of the Church of Norway. A Buddhist and two agnostics listened politely to us, served juice, coffee and tea, and explained that, being only part-time, they could not promise to be of help. They liked our work but had no mandate, and could only tell colleagues about us. They spoke about networking 'bilateral multi-faith' organizations and then suggested we 'hook' them into our network, and invite them to Banja Luka. Having spent all day in the office they looked tired and dispirited, so we left, apologising for taking up their time, and wondered why we had come to Norway.

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Enver Djuliman, a Serb academic, shared his office with several other NGOs in the Oslo Branch of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. Several other men sat at computers and stared at their turquoise flickering screens. Enver gave us piles of pamphlets and books he had researched and written about reconciliation.

He had little time to spare for us, because a group of visitors needed hosting and being shown a film of his work. However he had prepared a list of points which he presented to us as though we were children, who knew little, and had done nothing.

Firstly, he told us, we should understand the importance of rebuilding relationships between religions after the war. As a sign of goodwill each religion should offer to rebuild each others' houses.

He suggested that Catholics and Muslims be encouraged to help each other, but only in the Federation, not in the Republika Srpska. He did not explain why not there. Perhaps he felt that because the Republika Srpska had formed itself into a Serb Orthodox entity, the other faiths should leave. His name suggested he might be a Muslim, but in the formerly ethnically mixed Bosnia, one could not automatically come to such conclusions, so it was impossible to judge why he had this opinion.

He noted that the nationalists had made trouble at the site of the Ferhadija Mosque on May 7, and shrugged, declaring that the Serbs had no need to do this, implying that since the Muslims had been driven out, there was no reason for them to return.

He informed us there were active priests in the Dutch Helsinki Committee, working for the Council of Different Religions, and that the Academy of Human Rights in Mostar included people from Bosnia and Scandinavia, aged between eighteen and twenty five. They worked on human rights, multi-cultural understanding, reconciliation and dialogue between religions, using film and drama. We came across similar projects run by the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Banja Luka, using theatre to bring young people from all the communities creatively together. I describe one such workshop in my book, *the white house*.

He advised us to meet Jakob Finci and Marko Orsolc in Sarajevo, key people to help us with our project on truth, and sharing of memories. A commission had been established on the 13th March in Serbia to deal with the issue of stability in the country. This might affect whether our project should be public or anonymous.

He told us there were apparently already fifty Truth Conferences all over Bosnia. This came as a surprise because we had come across none of them. We had found

Jakob Finci, the President of the Jewish community in Bosnia, as well as Marko Orsolich, to be cynical about our aims, though both were sympathetic. Enver seemed to be out of date with his facts; within just a year we had become experts, and were more likely to give Enver useful information than receiving any from him. The discussion petered out with exhausted talk of applying for funds from Stability Pact Europe Aid in Brussels, knowing the unlikelihood of any success. He gave us names of other NGOs, and people to contact, names we had heard elsewhere, but who were already preparing to leave Bosnia for lack of funds, and be on their way to new trouble-spots with better chance of receiving grants. At the time, there seemed to be many groups working in the same field: academics doing much talking, arranging conferences and meetings, conducting seminars on the ‘destruction of cultural heritage’, but no sign of the kind of grass-roots projects we were aiming to establish.

To make up for the dismal responses so far to our aims, Donald pulled every stop out and gave a punchy tight presentation to Jo Sletbak at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sharp and defensive, Jo Sletbak kept an equally tight grip on the purse strings, determined to avoid slippage of fingers. Emma Wieck from the Balkan Desk sat in on the meeting. New to the job, she was still learning, and said little.

‘The Ferhadija Mosque is a provocative and difficult project, but it must happen. It is a matter of justice, reconciliation and peace,’ concluded Donald.

‘We share the same thoughts,’ responded Jo Sletback. ‘We have money for the Balkans. Under the rules of the Foreign Office, it cannot be for aid, because of politics. Stabilization is important and is not being done. Radar screens are no longer on the Balkans and yet the war is not over yet. We see it as you do. The United Nations are withdrawing, streamlining the process. A hundred million dollars could be put into aid, the need is always there. We can’t do that. The focus has to shift inwards

into the regions. We have lots of hope in the Nansen Centres. They are doing a good job, working with the youth.'

Emma Wieck entered the conversation tentatively, and talked about inter-religious projects in Albania and Macedonia. She wanted to make a study of their influence.

Donald expressed scepticism about this kind of project. Inter-religious councils made joint statements, he commented: elderly men, heading shrinking constituencies, never following up words with action, and going their own way afterwards. There might be hope with the clergy, but he was not convinced. Inter-religious dialogue had to go hand in hand with a search for justice.

Emma Wieck agreed, then talked about human rights and secular values. Jo Sletback spoke about the oppressive influence of the Orthodox Church resisting change and dialogue.

Graham Dyson pushed Emma Wieck for her perspective, and she admitted to being unsure. However she followed the line generally taken by European political leaders that religion was unimportant, and said smugly: 'We try to be open. Our instincts are that religion has no influence.'

She did not know what she was talking about.

'That's interesting,' countered Graham, biting his lip. 'The heavy hitters actually come from the religious organizations. We want to give an edge to the religious leaders so they exert more positive influence. But I suppose The Hague might feel undermined.'

He mentioned a minister on President Kostunica's board of advisors, who used to be a New York commissioner for truth and reconciliation in South Africa, and was helping the President of Serbia focus on human rights processes, and truth and reconciliation. Serbia was on the way.

‘I will go to The Hague,’ announced Donald. ‘I will talk about our programs. There need to be links and exchanges, fresh experience, fresh blood. The Hague lets the Republika Srpska off the hook. What about the desk criminals, the victims, the bystanders? We need to build up a collage of aural history. I’m a generalist so we need to bring in people from all over the world skilled in this process.’

‘This is a touchy issue,’ responded Jo Sletback, alarmed. ‘The issues are deep-rooted, culturally and politically. Communism was followed by armed conflict. The international community did not always help in the process. The Hague only deals with one part of it. Fresh views and blood are needed. The question is, how far can you go? There is a need to monitor progress of the Dayton Accord. It was needed at the time, but was it really the best solution? We would like to help with this. Ownership by the people of their countries will not happen quickly. There are minefields everywhere, not just on the ground.’

Commenting that partition of the country had not been a realistic alternative to ending the war, Graham Dyson, who accompanied us to the meeting, proposed establishing workshops in Bosnia that attracted the kind of serious and committed young people, who would become leaders and activists. The future of Bosnia as a whole was related to Europe: to create a European identity, rather than separate nationalist ones. Nansen Centres had achieved much, encouraging dialogue and self-ownership of issues, but their agenda needed to go further.

Graham was pressing the Foreign Ministry to encourage us to involve the Nansen Centres in more practical projects. He guessed that the Foreign Ministry was questioning its continued financial support of these Centres, when there seemed to be little progress on the ground.

‘How much genuine drive is there in the country’s desire to prosper, given that the issue of joining the European Union is all about prosperity?’ asked Jo Sletbak,

resisting all pressure to support us. ‘We are always hearing about the Saudis and their differences with Turkey. The Ferhadija could be a symbol of European Islam.’

‘How do you feel about that?’ asked Donald hoping to keep the door open, given this crumb of a positive comment.

‘It is important to push from many directions. The size of the stick should match the size of the carrot. Give ownership to processes, and keep away from projects and programs not in line with our policy. We would like to stay in touch directly, particularly concerning dialogue projects. That process we are interested in. See where you are going, and keep banging on doors. We won’t jump on straight away, but in the future keep in touch, and we will see what we can do. Your efforts will develop smaller or larger projects and processes. Don’t reinvent the wheel or step on toes. Hook things up with Nansen centres. We are not set in one path. It is important to be open. Build partnerships with Norwegian groups though, because then we can consider funding them. The ministry and government can do quality control. The Ferhadija Mosque project is very important. It sends a strong signal to Europe. We will consider funding it along with the UK and other European governments, but we won’t come on quickly. It will be hard to sell that big project. Small ones are a possibility.’

Graham Dyson challenged the ministry’s approach. Emphasising the Ferhadija Mosque project would provoke dialogue and attract attention. ‘It is a sexy project’. He also urged the ministry to support us and our relationship with the Nansen Centres. We needed each other.

This meeting reminded us again of the fundamental weakness of European political thinking: lack of imagination. Advising caution, not rocking boats or upsetting allies, however corrupt and tainted, was a way of sidestepping painful issues, which

remained unresolved and simmered in perpetuity, ready to erupt in future wars, for which Europe would deny any responsibility.

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On the way out of the ministry we discussed the fundamental aim of human rights.

‘A person is a person through other people,’ declared Graham Dyson. ‘Archbishop Tutu said that.’

He then cheered us up with an amusing anecdote about Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. Mandela favoured shirts looking like pyjama tops, and Tutu criticised him, saying they did not befit a president. Mandela retorted with a loud laugh: ‘That’s rich coming from a man who wears a dress!’

THE MYTH OF SEPARATE HISTORIES

THE MOSQUE AT GRADISKA. VISIT TO BOSNIA JULY 2002

Regularly crossing the River Sava from Croatia to Bosnia at Bosanska Gradiska we got used to seeing a large sign standing beyond the border post, and directly in front of an Orthodox church. The sign announced in Cyrillic script that we were entering the Republika Srpska, not Bosnia. The sign was a declaration of the ambitions of the Bosnian Serb nationalist party, founded by Radovan Karadjic, that the Republika Srpska he helped create should be considered an independent country.

In July 2002, on the orders of the Office of the High Representative, the border crossing had been forced to replace the sign with a *Welcome to Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The old sign still stood, a few yards behind, and less prominently.

Orthodox churches lined the road all the way to Banja Luka, indicating that Serbs were now the majority here. All the mosques had been destroyed; so far, no sign remaining that they had ever existed. However a couple of Catholic churches, scarred

by shelling, survived the war; one belonging to a community of nuns who had been forcibly evicted, as well as being raped, and their priest murdered. Another Catholic church stood isolated beyond a large field by the road, and had been converted into a hospital for drug addicts.

On our latest winter visit to Banja Luka a new mosque, rearing its snow white minaret by the roadside beyond Gradiska, surprised us. The minaret had been decorated with lights like a Christmas tree, a defiant and attractive gesture which announced: 'I am here. We are here.' On each subsequent visit to Banja Luka we expected to see the mosque in ruins, but it remained standing, a symbol of the presence of Islam in the Republika Srpska, this entity having been defined as an area cleansed of Muslims.

We had spent time with the Catholic and Orthodox bishops, visiting their dioceses, but the imams and mufti of Banja Luka had yet to show us their muftiluk. Perhaps they still did not trust us. So this visit had special significance, the chief purpose being to attend the opening of this mosque in Gradiska: the first to be erected since the war.

Deputies of the Office of the High Representative in Banja Luka were turning over one every two months since Georges Bordet had left. The last one, from England, departed for personal reasons and the present one told us he too would leave shortly. Our meeting was therefore inconsequential, listening to facts we already knew, and sensing the man had no interest in either Bosnia or us. For instance he praised Brcko, a neutral self governing district on the North Eastern border of Bosnia and Serbia where an attempt was made to encourage the different communities to live together, as an example of successful multi-cultural co-existence. However we knew there were many problems in Brcko: for instance Serb and Muslim children were being taught separately, not together.

The Deputy High Representative told us about a meeting with Mirko Šarović, president of the Republika Srpska, who would, less than a year later, be forced to resign on corruption charges, specifically around accusations of organizing illegal military trade with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Šarović declared Bosnia to be a country with two histories, one Serb Orthodox, the other Muslim, immediately making the error of omitting Catholic history.

This pernicious misreading of history is not particular to Bosnia. My education in England placed the British at the epicentre of world events, especially in regard to its empire, in which foreign people were considered inferior, and Great Britain to be a benevolent and civilizing influence on savages.

History is not the sole possession of a particular group. History is a universal event. It embraces all places, times and peoples. Different and various cultures clash, intermingle, take and learn from one another, suffer, destroy each other, benefit one from the other. History tries to chronicle these events. Any single interpretation from the point of view of one group can be of interest only as an indication as to how that group behaves, its psychology, but leads immediately to a misrepresentation of history. The twentieth century witnessed several examples of how such distortions led to destruction, murder, and atrocities, on a scale the world is still trying to come to terms with. There is no such thing as 'separate' history. That contention is a lie.

The young people we met in Bosnia understood this, while their parents, on all sides, remained locked in the mythology of their individual nationalisms. Several teenagers taking part in our 2004 project in Prijedor were enthused, and prepared, to perform a play in three sections which would take a single event from their country's history, far enough in the past to avoid unnecessary controversy, and depict this event from three points of view: Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim. These youngsters grasped the

necessity of understanding, and accepting, the truth of history as a whole: not romanticised and glossed for political ends.

We considered this project to be worthwhile and of interest to the international community, which thought otherwise, and refused to support it.

FATHER ZVONKO

A distorted view of history had tried to destroy the community of Presnace, a village on the outskirts of Banja Luka. As this book has already mentioned, on May 12 2002, Bosnian Serb militia broke into the priest's house and confronted Father Philip Lukenda and a nun, Sister Cecilia Grgie, saying: 'Catholics have no place in the new Greater Serbia.' They tried to force the priest to rape the nun, a fact reported to Bishop Komarica by one of the militia men the bishop visited in prison after the war. Father Philip Lukenda refused. He and Sister Cecilia Grgie were then killed and the bodies left in the priest's house, which the soldiers set alight, along with the church.

Now Father Zvonko, a priest bearing the weight of the world, Atlas-like, on his shoulders, was rebuilding the church together with the able-bodied men of Presnace: Muslim, Orthodox as well as Catholic. The joint skills of the community were being used to construct a large church, together with a hall and a place for youth activities. The people worked slowly, purchasing materials from donations, brick by brick. Now they had begun the roof. A broad flight of steps led imposingly up to the main church building, which looked out over a wide panorama of hills and woods. Presnace had always been a place of pilgrimage, on account of the church's dedication to St Theresa of Lisieux. Now it would become a place of pilgrimage in honour of Father Philip Lukenda and Sister Cecilia Grgie. Presnace would always be the pilgrimage church of the Banja Luka diocese.

Father Zvonko was washing the cement off his hands as we arrived. A bath tub stood in the middle of a field, covered with tough straggling weeds: burdock, dandelions and thistles. He had cut his hair which, on our previous visit, used to be tied in a ponytail. He now looked trim, priestly, and ascetic. He smiled mischievously in response to Donald's offer of finding an organ for the church. 'So when can we expect this organ?' Father Zvonko asked Donald, who yet again had committed himself to a difficult promise.

'We are glad you came back,' Father Zvonko said kindly as we sat round a table in his small office and drank coffee. 'It means that what we are doing must be right. We work mainly with the young. They have a future unlike in any other country. Most people are over thirty. Those who are over twenty six behave like adolescents. In the war, children became old in a matter of days. They missed out on childhood and now we must try and help them.'

A solemn young teenager, Igor, sat with us and explained that he had established a youth group for people from Banja Luka and surrounding villages, not just from Presnace. They planned meetings with religious leaders, politicians, teachers and business people. We could help with this program, sharing speakers, and initiating conversations in Banja Luka and the surrounding area. Presnace had experience of hosting large numbers of people, from years of accommodating hundreds of pilgrims. Their first project consisted of education, teaching languages and computer skills. New relationships developed across the ethnic groups which were not exclusively Catholic or religious. All were welcome. They would train people to be independent, 'capacity building' in the modern jargon, and encourage dialogue and tolerance.

They had ideas and goodwill but needed ten thousand euros immediately for a year's building project. Donald's article for *The Tablet*, a Catholic newspaper in England, alerting the Catholic Church to the atrocities committed at Presnace, and intended to

raise money and support for the diocese of Banja Luka, had so far attracted just one cheque for a hundred pounds: not a promising start..

Suddenly Father Zvonko announced there used to be a Catholic Church dedicated to St Elizabeth on the site of the Ferhadija Mosque. Adnan sighed, and told us that this claim had been made by a Croat nationalist: an attempt by the Catholics to stop rebuilding the mosque. Bishop Peric of Mostar was insisting that sites of now destroyed mosques should be returned to Catholics, who were alleging that churches existed there previously, in the Middle Ages. Father Zvonko tried to be conciliatory: ‘Of course Muslims need their places of worship.’ But Adnan would not be silenced on the issue of ownership. Archaeological digs were now being set up to find proof of the existence of these churches. Ottoman Muslims had on the whole respected Christian churches and avoided building on sacred ground belonging to other faiths.

Father Zvonko looked at Adnan severely, and said: ‘It is a matter of fact that the Catholics were here in Bosnia before the Muslims.’

Catholic cathedrals, monasteries, abbeys, and churches throughout England, had been vandalised and taken over by the Church of England during the sixteenth century, not long after the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans. It had all been long ago and, over time, communities absorbed these changes. Recently Serb nationalists tried to turn the clock back by cleansing Bosnia of Islam. They just needed time to cover the traces of their crimes. Now survivors ensured that the matter of justice concerning the violent manner of this ethnic cleansing was not forgotten.

The argument between Father Zvonko and Adnan implied historical absolutes claimed by one group or another: ‘this land, this property and this tradition belonged to us’. In that case, should Chartres Cathedral be returned to the pagan worshippers, who originally ‘possessed’ the spring, around which the sacred site developed?

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Throughout history, people have disputed ownership, while communities moved across the world, violently conquering or peaceably settling. What mattered was justice: raising issues of past crimes that had been forgotten or ignored. History turned into a chronicle of perpetual vendetta. If, as Gibbon stated, history is simply the record of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind, then every country and community carries a burden of guilt, for which there can never be enough apologies or compensation. How, for instance, can Germany ever begin to atone for the murder of millions of Jews, let alone instigating the Second World War, and the subsequent loss of many million more lives? How can anyone come to terms with this issue? My teenage self came up with an idea for atonement. A year should be devoted to the memory of each victim. This would focus the world's attention on the value of an individual, and what that person's unnecessary suffering and death meant. In such a case, atonement would last till the solar system burnt itself out. On the issue of prevention, rather than suffering unimaginable consequences, Julian Barnes wrote about our imminent invasion of Iraq, declaring it was not worth the loss of a single child's finger. This echoes the dilemma posited by Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*: is saving the world worth the life of a child? However, that controversial contention needs to be understood in its context. It is posited by the cool, intellectual brother, who sets himself beyond morality. The other brothers represent different approaches, and the book's last word is given to the youngest brother, who trusts most in the fundamental goodness of human behaviour. Despite all the evidence, unflinchingly laid out in his final novel, showing incontrovertibly that the world is cruel, heartless and beyond redemption, Dostoevsky ultimately puts his faith in naivety; that is as critical an ingredient of hope as the nucleus is of an atom.

Chartres Cathedral provides an answer to the issue of rights and ownership by embracing past, present and future: reconciliation and coexistence are celebrated in every part of the building, including the celebrated labyrinth on the floor. Pagan sources are visible in its design, which also acknowledges the influence of Islam. Crusaders, returning from the Middle East, incorporated architectural motifs they admired in the buildings built by the enemy they were so bitterly fighting.

Father Zvonko, though adamant on the matter of Catholic history in Bosnia, expressed more interest in people than in buildings. ‘*We* are the church,’ he emphasised the pronoun, ‘not buildings’. He told us that the rebuilding of the church at Presnace had initially not been his priority. But the people insisted. ‘The church was their heart.’ The nuns who worked there had represented security, and if nothing else, the people found a few moments of sympathy and understanding from them in times of crisis. The construction also meant work for the community. A few families in trade could earn a little. It was also better for returnees to witness progress rather than ruins. ‘Churches and mosques were the identity of their communities, which was why they were the first buildings to be destroyed,’ Father Zvonko reminded us, and added: ‘When you go to villages and you see nothing, so a church or a mosque provides a centre, a public space – even a public fountain to drink from.’

Still smarting from the argument about the alleged church on the site of the Ferhadija, Adnan asked whether Father Zvonko had got permission for rebuilding the church in Presnace. He was thinking of safety regulations.

Father Zvonko again looked severely at him and said: ‘before I answer that, you have to answer me this: did they get permission to destroy the church?’

When officials and politicians talked to us defensively about our project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque, they raised objections and constantly fell back on legal

arguments about procedures, saying: 'It is the law.' We always wanted to ask whether the law had permitted them to destroy the mosque in the first place.

The difference of opinion between Father Zvonko and Adnan raised another disturbing question: 'Should an individual version of the past determine the future?'

On a small island in the middle of Lake Bled in Slovenia stands a church, surrounded by large trees. It is reached by rowing boat, and then ascending a flight of ninety steps. No motorboats are allowed, so the lake remains unspoilt, the tranquillity broken only by the laughter and shouts of children, splashing along the water's edge. Excavations showed a previous sacred site under the church on the island, and visitors peer through a glass floor at a pile of stones where archaeologists uncovered an ancient tomb with skeletons. These mysterious remnants of another culture are incorporated into the baroque building, in the same way that Chartres, and other cathedrals, absorbed, rather than disavowed, the influences of religions they replaced.

On one of our visits to Sarajevo Sabira Husedzinovic proposed turning a ruin in Jajce which had been Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim at some stage in its history into a place dedicated to all the religions, to celebrate the diversity of the city's history rather than perpetuate its violent past. St Mary's Church is now a national monument.

THE MOSQUE IN GRADISKA

Ten years before this latest visit, almost to the day, the journalist Penny Marshall met and photographed Fikret Alic at Trnopolje, a Serb controlled prison camp. His emaciated body, standing behind barbed wire, was a shocking reminder of the concentration camps in the Second World War: atrocities Europe had thought to have left in the past. This report led to the closure of what turned out to have been killing camps in the Prijedor region, and so saved the life of Fikret Alic. After being

detained in Croatia he fled to Denmark. Others were not so lucky. The Serbs had warned them not to speak to the journalists; they would otherwise be killed, although that was already intended to be their fate. 'There were guards escorting us all the time,' explained Penny Marshall, 'listening to every word: a secret policeman filming every step we took. I don't know how Fikret got away alive. Most of those we spoke to that day have never been heard of since. I think about that too, when I dare.'

Trnopolje lay some twenty miles to the west of the new mosque at Gradiska. When we arrived at Gradiska, crowds of Muslims were already gathering from the town and surrounding villages and being frisked by Bosnian Serb police, who were tolerant and good-humoured. Fields surrounded the mosque, but no Serbs demonstrated or made an attack. The atmosphere lightened into party mood. Apart from a cluster of imams, and a few elderly women wearing hijabs, the people were indistinguishable from their Serb neighbours, a number of whom also attended the ceremony. The younger women dressed stylishly, some in the skimpiest of dresses, and the young men, cocksure in tight vests and trousers, showed off their athletic physiques.

Mufti Camdzic gave a rousing speech to the crowds who shook their heads at his oratory, smiling but nervous. He began at top volume, then proceeded by degrees to get louder and louder, raising his voice by semitones, like an enthusiastic organist urging a congregation to sing a hymn with more vigour. The speech sounded like a call to arms, but, according to Adnan, was about reconciliation and desire to live at peace with Orthodox and Catholic neighbours. Others gave speeches, including a Catholic priest representing Bishop Komarica, and the Serb mayor of Gradiska, all talking about tolerance and living together. People wept, smiled, and looked on, beaming with joy: the sufferings of the last ten years not forgotten but dissolving momentarily in the hope of healing. Before the deputy of the Reis rounded off the ceremony with prayers Mufti Camdzic invited Donald to speak,.

‘Salaam Aleichem!’ roared Donald over the heads of the enraptured crowd, his voice carried by booming loudspeakers across the surrounding cornfields to the surrounding villages and town.

The people immediately responded with the most enthusiastic cheer of the day.

Like Mufti Camdzic, Donald understood that this was not just about the rebuilding of a mosque, but the return of pride and dignity. The people did not need to apologize anymore for being Muslim, skulking in fear of their lives.

Donald then followed his shockingly loud greeting with an anecdote about three friends from Bosnia, one Catholic, one Orthodox and one Muslim, who had phoned him a few weeks earlier. Each of them had asked him about the weather, whether it was raining in England. Long before the punch line, the crowd had got the message and were clapping, cheering, smiling and wiping their eyes.

After the ceremony, the doors to the mosque were opened and the crowd pressed forward, eyes wide and glistening, eager to step inside

On the road, the sun beating down from a cloudless sky, even the Serb police looked friendly, smiled, and waved us on our way.

FROM VIENNA TO SARAJEVO

VISIT TO AUSTRIA AND BOSNIA 2002

In 1914, a hundred years ago as I write this, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire took a journey from Vienna to Sarajevo. This provocative visit triggered the First World War. For centuries the Ottomans and Hapsburgs had faced each other off, along the borders of their empires across Eastern Europe. Long before 1914, the Ottoman Empire had been in decline: for economic and political reasons,

not helped by a bloated bureaucracy that hampered effective administration.

Meanwhile the Hapsburgs under Emperor Franz Joseph II were at a zenith of power and influence. Bosnia became a jewel in their crown. Sarajevo had always been the capital of Ottoman Muslim interests in the Balkans, and Austria planned to extend its influence further south. The rise of nationalist movements across Europe, especially Greece, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Poland, all demanding independence after centuries of being pawns in Austrian or Turkish warring ambitions, shook the foundations of both empires. The Serbs took advantage of the Ottoman Empire's decline, its death throes like that of a star, fuel exhausted, and expanding monstrously before the inevitable collapse into a black hole. Though having fought at various times on the side of both Turks and Austrians, but now secure in the backing of powerful Russian Slav cousins, the Serbs decided to take on the Hapsburgs. The purpose of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's visit was to tell the Serbs that their imperial masters would not tolerate secession by a country which had been a crucial bulwark for Christian Europe against the Islamic East.

The assassination of the Archduke by an extremist Serb nationalist led inevitably to the cementing of alliances across the rest of Europe, and a mobilization of arms and men burning with patriotic fervour, to end German and Austrian, as well as Turkish might and influence. These empires were dismantled but the price of this victory led directly to global social and political upheaval, the Second World War, the Cold War, revolutions and bitter conflicts that scarred the rest of the century and continue. In Europe the basic issues focussed on the continent's identity and individual national interests. It was no coincidence that the darkest aspects of the Second World War centred on the wholesale massacre of civilian people, above all the genocide of Jews, gypsies, gays and political dissidents: people considered alien to a Christian European way of life. Anti-Semitism had been endemic in Europe since the Middle Ages and

remains so, though now kept under control by policies determined not to repeat the horrific excesses of that war. Islam has also always been identified as alien to an essentially Christian Europe. The ebb and flow of Muslim influence defined the borders of eastern and southern Europe for over a thousand years, and suspicion remain a legacy of this conflict, but now on a global scale. 9:11 stunned the world with a reminder that this issue remains unresolved.

It was no coincidence that the last European war of the twentieth century should have once again been fought around Sarajevo.

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I am a direct product of what has become known as the Holocaust, Shoah: the attempted genocide of Jews. If my parents had not become refugees I would not have been born. My life has been shadowed by the awareness that a large part of my home continent did not want me to exist. To be a Jew was considered shameful. Jewish reaction to these attitudes varies from suicidal self-hatred to extreme forms of Zionism, which insists that Jews are entitled to their own country, that the Holy Land is a gift from God to one people only, and this divine gift permits the exclusion of all others, even using violence and oppression as the means.

Anti-Semitism among nationalist Europeans, although not eradicated, manifests itself less than it used to, because Muslims have become the new aliens, and Zionism has been co-opted in the fight against Islam. The fascist movements in England, which had once allied themselves with the Nazis, now forge links with Israel.

I am neither a Zionist nor a suicidal self-hating Jew, but I continue to have the sense of being unwelcome, that I should not be here. Quakers, and a minority of decent people, made it possible for refugees to find homes in England: but when they arrived, the majority felt a mixture of pity and distaste. Socialites at dinner parties could be overheard remarking on this unpleasant invasion from Central Europe. They gave

voice to acceptable opinion. 'Central European' meant Jewish. Awareness of a person's precarious position in the world, not really at home anywhere, but nevertheless determined to survive, encourages my empathy with those who are persecuted. I need to understand and explain the issues at the heart of human conflicts, which lead to displacement, homelessness and lack of welcome.

My mother's family came from Vienna, so I knew this city throughout my life, including the brief post-war period when the Soviet Union controlled that half of Austria. My step-grandmother once picked me up at the border and gave me a sleeping pill. I was five years old at the time. She feared that my speaking in English would rouse the suspicions of the Russian guards.

Until the dissolution of the Iron Curtain that cut the continent into two hostile halves, with a border difficult and dangerous to cross between 1945 and 1989, Vienna nestled relatively neglected in the far eastern corner of Western Europe, surrounded on three sides by the intimidating presence of Soviet controlled Czechoslovakia and Poland to the north, Hungary to the east and Yugoslavia to the south. The city, once the administrative centre of the Hapsburg Empire, continued to reflect the influence of its imperial past, different from anywhere else in Western Europe, most noticeably in a cuisine including Hungarian goulash, Czech beer and dumplings, Balkan fruit brandies and a Turkish heritage of coffee, and exotic confectionary. After people smashed the walls between east and west down, those from former Soviet countries flowed into Vienna looking for work and a better standard of life, just as my grandfather had done at the start of the century: a young farmer's son leaving his impoverished Moravian village to make a better life. My grandmother experienced the First World War as a teenage nurse, attending soldiers, who suffered horrific injuries. She lost her brothers in the fighting, then chose to study pharmaceuticals at Vienna's

university. She left her Jewish father's family business: a department store in L'viv in the part of Ukraine which had been administered by the Hapsburgs before the war.

The ancestors of my great-great-grandfather, Rabbi Friedmann, uprooted themselves from Spain a hundred years earlier, to settle in Vienna. The Hapsburgs had then ruled swathes of Southern Europe thanks to a series of dynastic marriages between royal houses. These unions, which were meant to end wars and bring peace between nations, failed to prevent the First World War when Queen Victoria's children's families, who ruled most of Europe, fell out with cataclysmic results.

Meanwhile, ordinary people like my forbears, traders and academics, were still able to move freely across borders, and settle where they could make a better life for their families.

Vienna, facing the eastern plains from the slopes and forests of the lower Alps, was always protected by the Danube River, which flows with a powerful undertow round the northern suburbs, not through the city. It had been a frontier post from Roman times: a bastion against invasion from any direction. Foreigners, including Jews, made it their home, and created a blend of traditions and cultures that turned Vienna into an international capital of art and thought, attracting visitors from all over the continent.

Vienna was a major city the Ottoman Empire failed to conquer. The Turkish army laid a final siege in 1683, the ones before being in 1485 and 1529. They had not aimed to overrun Europe, but to consolidate and protect their area of influence, which reached as far north as Hungary, and included most of the Balkans. Then Polish and Lithuanian troops lead by Jan Sobieski drove the Ottomans back south.

Vienna celebrated this victory by inventing a piece of confectionary known as a kipferl (little crescent), which can be both a flaky croissant, and also a crescent shaped biscuit, particularly popular at Christmas time. It may seem a flippant response to a

major historical event, but it struck me as touching that the Turkish threat should be assimilated into the culinary culture of a liberated city. The biscuit is made of roughly equal measures of butter, sugar and ground walnuts, or almonds, blended, baked and dusted with vanilla-flavoured icing sugar. The memory of the Muslim invasion lives on as a popular delicacy. I bake these biscuits every year and friends appreciate them.

Viennese ambivalence towards the enemy manifested itself in music. Exotic colours and rhythms made Turkish marches popular. However, Mozart explored cultural contrasts with a depth and subtlety that keep the differences perennially relevant in his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. I refer to this work frequently because it resonates with the aims of the Soul of Europe. Sung in demotic German, rather than Italian, then considered the traditional language of opera, Mozart brought the issue of culture clash home to an audience who, a century on, still feared Islamic conquest. At a time when the Muslim invader remained a bogeyman, no different to our present-day Islamic terrorist, Mozart dared to suggest that the enemy might be more civilized than us. However, Osmin, the main comic character in what is essentially a light-hearted entertainment, is a grotesque parody of what Europeans feared most in the enemy: a male bully who delights in punishment, torture and death. A splendidly realized creation, over which Mozart took special care, tailoring the part for a star singer, Osmin is a projection of our most extreme fears. As stupid as he is cruel, he remains unreconstructed at the end: a realistic touch. His intransigence contrasts with his master Pasha Selim's act of forgiveness and declaration of humanity, which puts to shame the vengefulness of those who had once killed his family, and taken him captive. In this, Mozart shows himself to be a child of the Enlightenment: a believer in the power of reason to keep violent passions in check, and the need to understand and sympathise with all human beings, however varied and different their backgrounds, and however much we might fear and hate them. A Muslim also appears in Mozart's

last opera *The Magic Flute*. As cruel and vindictive as Osmin, Monostatos is nevertheless given a monologue which questions why, because of his colour, race and faith he should be considered less human. Mozart implies that savagery comes from prejudice and oppression; that people can become more humane through reason and empathy ... and music: especially Mozart. In one of the most captivating moments of the opera, just as a group of Muslim slaves are about to take two of the protagonists prisoner, an exquisite tune is played on the glockenspiel. The enraptured slaves drop the chains and begin to sing and dance. Throughout *The Magic Flute*, music heals and assists. The sound of the flute's melody tames beasts, and brings us safely through fire and flood. Magic bells bring love.

On my childhood visits, Vienna was a shell of its former self: a magnificent monument to old Europe. Dedicated to cake-shops, tourists and culture, the consumer society was trying to ignore the seediness of a city in ruins at the end of the war, an atmosphere conjured in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*. The film can still be seen on a perpetual loop in a cinema on the Ring Strasse that encircles the city centre.

The Nazis had extinguished the challenging and vibrant intellectual life of a pre-war generation. Survivors, including Sigmund Freud and his family, settled in other parts of the world. Sitting in smart coffeehouses, I observed the ostentatious wealth which provoked the envy of communist Europe beyond the adjacent borders. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, I noted the dismay of the Viennese, suddenly being shaken out of their complacency by the sudden unwelcome influx from the east, north and south. Street crime soared, and the cafés and small hotels filled with rough-looking Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians and Serbs searching for work and setting up businesses. Vienna became a magnet and centre of influence again, a meeting point of crossing cultures. Once more it became a city of possibilities.

PRO ORIENTE

Mrs Aglae Hagg, assistant to the director of Pro Oriente, met us outside Stephansdom, Vienna's Gothic cathedral, and led us through the narrow streets of the city centre to the palace of the Hofburg. Pro Oriente, an organization concerned with relations between all Christian faiths in Eastern Europe has offices above the world-famous Spanish Riding School. Upstairs, people discuss inter-religious issues. Downstairs specializes in dressage: a tortuous sport in which elegantly costumed riders control their spirited, prancing and elaborately groomed horses into performing neat but unnatural movements, like ballet.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand left Vienna for his fateful journey to Sarajevo, possibly from the palace of the Hofburg, the epicentre of the Empire. Massive statues of naked wrestling men adorn the fountains and entrances on the side of the palace which faces the old city, with its baroque churches and narrow streets. The other side of the palace looks across a park bordering the Ringstrasse, along which stand the main civic buildings of Vienna: a neo-Gothic town hall, a parliament built in classical Roman style, with winged statues and chariots, befitting the city's imperial pretensions, a national theatre and international opera house, both decorated in flamboyant baroque style. Two grand museums face each other across another park.

I used to visit these museums regularly, the one full of stuffed animals, fossils and dinosaurs, and the other standing opposite, packed with paintings, including large collections by Titian, Velazquez, Rubens and Breughel, reflecting the taste of emperors, and the former reach of the Austrian Empire, sucking these foreign masterpieces from its dominions to its centre.

Art and confectionary continue to be the chief reasons for visiting Vienna. However, the culture is mostly of the past. Even the shockingly revolutionary paintings and music of the early part of the twentieth century have become museum pieces. The raw emotions of Egon Schiele's paintings and drawings, with their contorted, thin, bony naked bodies, ravaged faces and boldly displayed genitals, are contained in smart frames. In coruscating psychodramas, Richard Strauss's *Elektra* has a daughter and mother shrieking at each other, battling nightmares of guilt and family dysfunction; and in *Salome*, a spoilt disturbed girl kisses the bloodied lips of the decapitated head of a man who has rejected her advances. These operas are now performed expertly, in a luxurious setting, before opulently dressed audiences.

This development is nothing new in Vienna. A century before Schiele and Strauss, Mozart struggled with financial problems before he died, and was then turned into a major tourist attraction: a chocolate hazelnut confection and an institution.

Governments always kept a watchful eye on revolutionaries and dissidents, including the Bohemian friends of Schubert. This composer lived, composed, and died young in a cramped room. Meanwhile, conservative Viennese society focused on superficial pleasures: being fashionable, coffee houses, and new dance crazes. Then, the city recovered from a debilitating war, the defeat of Napoleon, and now emerges from the shadow of Hitler. Embarrassed it keeps silent about its part in the Second World War.

After a performance of Chehov's *Three Sisters* in the National Theatre, the Burgtheater, I watched the audience exit through the grand, sumptuously-decorated and painted foyer. My grandmother stood by me, smiling cynically, the play pushed aside, as she pointed at the extravagantly dressed people saying: 'Can you guess the value of all that fur and jewellery you see?'

The issue about Bosnia's 'separate' histories emerged in our talk with Pro Oriente's director Dr Hans Marte, a thoughtful and kindly academic. A recent symposium, organized by Pro Oriente in Sarajevo, had produced a proposal to write a common history of Bosnia: a six year commission. He surprised us on two counts. First, he seemed happy with the improving relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Serbia, where Catholics were in a minority, as in Banja Luka. Apart from official meetings between the leaders, we had come across little sign of good relations anywhere. Secondly, and this surprised us even more, Pro Oriente had little contact or interest in Islam, a peripheral concern in their work in the Balkans. Dr Marte agreed that they needed to reconsider this lack of priority. He seemed proudest of having persuaded Patriarch Cyril of the Russian Orthodox Church to engage in unofficial dialogue with Catholics.

Dr Marte had invited several specialists on Bosnia to meet us, including Christina von Kohl, a journalist, who had worked there for seventeen years during the time of Tito from 1968 to 1985, and Dr Valentin Inzco, a former ambassador, who would soon resume that post and then eventually be appointed High Representative.

We sat round a large table full of plates piled with cakes, biscuits, fruit and chocolates. We were listened to politely but after half an hour most of them had to leave. Timeless relaxed conversations and discussions were a thing of the past. People now, as a rule, exchange opinions, and barely register what others are saying, then hurry off to their next engagements. People we meet in England conduct discussions on serious matters while sitting at a computer, making comments to us while sending e mail and answering smart phones, or they apologize for not being able to give us full attention because they have to prepare for the next meeting, at which no doubt they will give the same apology.

Christina von Kohl, the journalist, had a bee in her bonnet about religion, which she despised, saying the economy of Bosnia had to be built up first before attempting to make other changes, such as improving relations between the communities. Reflecting the current secular attitude in the European Union, she insisted on knowing the situation better than anyone, especially us, having worked in Bosnia for so many years. We did not argue with her. However, Valentin Inzco, the former ambassador, took a liking to us and spoke encouraging words. He described encountering similar problems between the different faiths in all these places.

Valentin Inzco reminded me of my father's generation, a lively questioning open mind, giving us full attention, warm and relaxed. We would meet him a few more times in Bosnia, and with his open-necked shirt and habit of wearing shorts in hot weather, however official the occasion, he was one of the few international leaders we encountered who was encouraging.

The journalist left first, having contemptuously criticised our priorities with the religious communities. The remaining guests were more cooperative. Petrus Bsteh worked on Islamic-Christian relations, mainly in Austria but also throughout Europe. He gave us names, promised to set up meetings and informed us of links between Banja Luka and Austrian cities like Linz and Graz, which no one had told us about.

Petrus Bsteh looked tired and burdened with the troubles of the world.

Then Franz Prueller, who worked for Catholic Caritas, gave a long speech about the work being achieved by the charity in Bosnia. Not for the first or the last time, we listened to someone who painted such a rosy picture of life in the Balkans that we wondered why anyone needed us there. We were left wondering why the Catholic diocese in Banja Luka still required help when Austrian Caritas was pouring so many millions of dollars in that direction. Caritas also supported social work, looked after raped women, and gave social and economic support. According to Franz Prueller,

Caritas had excellent relations with Mehamet, the Islamic aid agency, and a recent Austrian project, 'Neighbour in Need', had raised one hundred and twenty million Euros. They were now in an intensive process of developing local Caritas organizations throughout Bosnia. They supported ecumenical activities, such as a home for the disabled in Mostar.

All this information and good news was overwhelming, and had we not been visiting Bosnia regularly, every month over the last year, and witnessed for ourselves the extent of poverty and need for rebuilding, Franz Pruessler's presentation would have persuaded us that Bosnia had no need of us: everything had been accomplished, and life there could hardly be improved.

Not deluded by this speech, Donald gave a weighty presentation about the need to develop civil society, build up business opportunities, open up Banja Luka, and 'tell the story of contested history', this being a fundamental task of a civic forum.

Valentin Inzco seized with delight on our methods and quoted Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, who had recently declared to the Austrian president, Dr Busak: 'We don't need money. We need friendship most.'

Valentin Inzco commented on how forgotten the people in Bosnia looked. 'Friendship is underestimated in Europe.' He approved of our integrated approach and the European perspective which would encourage the people.

'Civil society is a priority. Build your mosque!' he exclaimed.

He then proposed schemes where young people instead of going into the army, should do social work, and told us to collar the European Commissioner Chris Patten in Brussels, and not be put off by officials there.

His words about friendship and trust encouraged us, because this had always been, and continued to be, the bedrock of our process. Without friendship we could not have persuaded Bishop Jefrem to leave his diocese for a few days and come to the

Coventry Consultation. Even Margit, Bishop Komarica's watchdog, critical of our inability to raise millions for him, had to concede that our friendship with the bishop was important. Friendship is strong and lasting; it survives even long periods, when, like a river, it sometimes disappears underground, but emerges later in full flow. Friendship does not necessarily achieve results, but it keeps the vision alive, so one day in the future, things can change and happen.

Commenting on Valentin Inzco's advice to us on buttonholing important politicians in the EU, another guest, Walter Reichel, a young man working for the Institute for the Danube Region, said: 'It is very difficult to get hold of these people. They don't have offices. They have airplanes.'

As the meeting ended with further exchange of names and contacts including the Belgrade mufti, whom we knew, and a Franciscan priest, Niko Ikić, whom we didn't, Pro Oriente invited us to attend a conference in Sarajevo, and Valentin Inzco spoke about the exceptional generosity of Bosnian people, asserting: 'They are the best!' We had experienced this, and yet for those who never visited there the statement might appear to fly in the face of the evidence of the Bosnia War, with its long catalogue of brutality and destruction.

'Not the politicians however!' declared Valentin Inzco.

THE TRAIN TO SARAJEVO

Trains leave the Westbahnhof in Vienna for Germany, France, Switzerland and the Benelux. The station stands at the end of one of the city's main shopping streets, surrounded by massive bill boards and expensive luxury hotels. Trains to the south and east leave from the Südbahnhof, which is situated in a poorer part of the city within some walking distance of apartment blocks, a few dingy shops and seedy-looking hotels.

In the later years of the Hapsburg Empire there were frequent trains to Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Balkans and Italy. The grand proportions of the Südbahnhof reflected its importance. My step grandmother arrived here from L'viv, then part of the Ukraine, and my grandfather from Moravia. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, young Poles, Hungarians and Serbs, among many others, alighted from trains and stood or sat on their packs, for a while overwhelmed by the space and sense of freedom and possibility.

Now the service has been drastically reduced. Few trains run daily to Zagreb. The one we took divided in Slovenia, so we were sitting in one of two almost empty carriages. Ten years ago, in the months immediately after the fall of communism, the trains were packed with families taking back goods in large bags: stores of food and electrical equipment. Now hardly anyone makes the journey: just a few backpackers, and relatives on vacation visiting their families.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand took this route to Sarajevo, traversing the foothills of the eastern Alps, passing through lower Austria, crossing the border into Slovenia, winding through Alpine valleys before entering Croatia.

The train from Zagreb to Sarajevo travels slowly for eight hours through a landscape where familiar church towers change to the slender minarets of mosques. But the Archduke would have seen the same acres of meadows covered in wild flowers, agriculture less organized than further north. There, manicured industrial farming is notable for the absence of grazing cattle, everything tidy and free of weeds and pests. On the way south, the towns look less prosperous and the landscape is teeming with livestock, roaming people and children.

This used to be Illyria in the Roman Empire. Its mountains and rivers provided a natural barrier against barbarians from the north and east. Shakespeare set his

romantic comedy *Twelfth Night* in Illyria. A sister is separated from her twin brother during a shipwreck and lands alone on the Dalmatian coast, only to be entangled in a complicated web of desire between people, who fall in unrequited love with each other. Shakespeare had never visited Illyria, and the name may have suggested a utopian place where emotions could cross boundaries of gender, class, age and country. The resolution of the play is ambiguous. There are losers and winners in this game. The sourness is tempered by a clown at the final curtain singing: 'A great while ago the world begun, with hey, ho, the wind and the rain. But that's all one. Our play is done.' This implies we have to make the best of things.

While Shakespeare was forging his career as an actor and playwright in England, at the same time, hundreds of miles away at the other end of Europe, Pasha Ferhad was building his famous mosque in Banja Luka, Bosnia: the heart of Illyria.

Our train to Zagreb moved slowly through the industrial areas south of Vienna, before passing medieval castles on hilltops, surrounded by vineyards, and then ascending, crossing and winding in between the precipitous slopes of the narrow, thickly-forested valleys of the eastern Alps. It then followed the River Mur along a wide valley, with high mountains on either side, all the way to Graz, then to the border with Slovenia and the city of Maribor, a region where Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary rubs shoulders with Austria. The train divided at the small river town of Zidani Most, several carriages proceeding to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, and two carriages, a smoking and a non-smoking one, continuing to Zagreb. On both Slovenian and Croatian borders the train stopped for an hour to change engines and allow customs officials to examine passports and check for smuggled goods. This length of time seemed overkill considering the size of the train and the few passengers. It reminded me of the border crossing between Belarus and the Ukraine

where, on my journey to Kiev in 1992, the train stopped for several hours at what looked like a small farm, and intimidating armed officials trooped out of a hut, mounted the train at both ends, and fiercely interrogated passengers, confiscating passports and terrorising everyone. Hens scratched in a barnyard next to the hut, a cat prowled through the undergrowth alongside the track, and morning mists rose over the plains and forests stretching in every direction with no other sign of human habitation. The border crossing between Belarus and Poland was even more intimidating, because secret police in trademark black leather jackets, accompanied the customs officials and anyone, like me, who did not have the correct documents for Belarus, even though we were passing through with no wish to leave the train, was arrested, interrogated and then supplied with an expensive visa.

The borders between the various regions of the former Yugoslavia had not existed in living memory, so officials now made a big deal of holding up traffic for hours on narrow roads and bridges that had never been intended for such a function.

The train then passed cornfields, flower-covered meadows, orchards, farms, villages, small towns, wide rivers, valleys, low-rolling hills alternating with high mountains, forests, churches both Catholic and Orthodox, mosques and increasingly from Zagreb to Sarajevo, empty mouldering factories. These colossal ruined monuments to communist industry illustrated the economic situation in Bosnia. Inactive chimneys reared above buildings with blankly staring windows, mostly empty of glass, and old pipes snaked around the cracking walls. These factories once represented economic and social security: focus of the community, people and vehicles in constant movement. Every worker could depend on a job for life, and be cared for in retirement, generation after generation. Now these acres of industrial site were left desolate, overgrown with weeds and brambles, strewn with rubbish blown by the wind. No one entered these places of crumbling walls, empty wagons and mounds of

twisting rusting metal. Instead, former workers waded into the middle of rivers, whiling away long hours of unemployment, fishing and waiting for change. Attractive countryside surrounded them, but rings of minefields discouraged exploration.

From Banja Luka the train avoided the Vrbas Gorge, and took a detour, east to Dobož along a valley so neglected that it looked the same as when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand made his journey. The track hugged the side of the River Bosna all the way south to Sarajevo, the valley bristling with minarets, through Maglaj, Zepce, Zenica and Višegrad: fertile valleys along tributaries stretching on both sides, to Vogosca, where the outskirts of Bosnia's capital covered hills with small houses. In between orchards and cornfields, patches of waste ground were still being de-mined, and fresh white tombstones covered large cemeteries.

The presence of so many mosques might have led the Archduke to fear Islamic opposition, but the fatal shot came from a young Serb separatist, Gavrilo Princip, who then leapt into Sarajevo's River Miljacka to escape arrest. The terrorist found it too shallow to swim, since the source is only a few kilometres away in the east, and police caught him easily.

Most cities are built round mature trade route rivers. Sarajevo, unusually, stood near the source of two. The Miljacka trickles shallowly through the city and joins the Bosna, which pours in several powerfully gushing fountains from the base of a mountainside, to the west of the city. This then flows as one of Bosnia's main rivers north towards the Sava and the Danube.

The mountains closing around Sarajevo were supposed to offer protection and shelter, but during the long siege of the city during the Bosnia War, Serbs pounded it with shells from the surrounding slopes, killing and injuring thousands of men, women and children, and destroying buildings. Sarajevo lay defenceless, and the Serb

army could do what they wanted, without danger of attack from below. What were once protective mountains turned the city into a killing ground.

A SECOND FOUNDATION STONE

The first foundation stone for the Ferhadija Mosque became an organized riot, at which Serb protesters hurled stones, and killed an elderly Muslim man. Banja Luka sent a message to the Islamic community: 'Go away. We don't want you here.' Ambassadors cowered in the Islamic Centre, and the Reis ul Ulema fled back to Sarajevo.

The purpose of the Soul of Europe's visit to Sarajevo represented the second foundation stone: the first meeting of the committee to rebuild the mosque. The presence of Donald, an Anglican priest, as vice-president, made this gathering, at the Architecture Faculty of Sarajevo University, unique.

Architects, politicians, religious leaders, lawyers and academics made up the committee hosted by Professor Muhamed Hamidovic. He and Adnan had prepared folders including a copy of the Annex 8 Agreement, in which the Dayton Accord stipulated that the religious communities should together rebuild destroyed places of worship, and also the Agreement signed in Coventry in September 2001 by the three religious leaders of Banja Luk, which committed them to supporting each other in this work.

Professor Hamidovic's detailed drawings and plans for the mosque were on display. The committee needed, as a priority, to authorize a study for the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque, prepared by the Architecture Institute. It consisted of drawings, introductory, technical and historical background, examination of necessary materials, and photographs in the form of a booklet, in Bosnian and English, which would be useful for fundraising.

Several expected people were not present. The Reis sent apologies, and a written message of encouragement: he was in New York addressing the United Nations. The Turkish ambassador sent a deputy, Serkan Gedik, a fresh-faced official, who seemed ignorant of the project, and smiled nervously all the time. However the leaders of the Islamic community in Banja Luka were there in force. Meliha Filipovic, the elderly lawyer, looked discouraged, bitter and exhausted by her unconstructive battles with the authorities. In contrast, Resad Salihovic, Mufti Camdzic's assistant at the Banja Luka Islamic Centre, had his face set with grim determination for a long fight. Vahdet Alemljic, the imam of Banja Luka, and Omer Visic, the deputy mayor, were cheerful and enthusiastic. Sabira Husedzinovic, representing the Ministry of Culture, brought a series of proposals. She was determined to see the project to its completion. Anwar Azimov, beaming at us as always, represented the Office of the High Representative.

Recovering from a recent operation, Professor Hamidovic looked drawn and lean, but the task and presence of the committee energised him. Valery Perry from the European Centre for Minority Issues, and the kind of tough woman no one messed with, attended the meeting. Rusmir Ciscic, the Muslim half of the directorship of the Mostar Bridge Project, arrived to share his experience, and told us to concentrate on preparing the ground for what was always going to be a provocative project.

The Banja Luka municipality kept setting up bureaucratic roadblocks, stalling any progress. Plans to surround the entire site of the mosque with buildings tall enough to hide it, had been recently steered through the National Assembly. This cynical ruse could be construed as a bluff, since the economic situation in the Republika Srpska did not make such an expensive project financially feasible. However, just the existence of such plans perpetuated anti-Muslim anti-mosque attitudes. So the Soul of Europe's specific task needed to focus on easing the atmosphere, and persuading the majority of people in Banja Luka to accept and welcome back this historic building.

Mufti Camdzic opened the meeting, although, up to the last moment, he had threatened to boycott it, because he considered the Soul of Europe to be controlled by Serb nationalists. Adnan argued with him over the phone, saying that if the mufti did not want us to help, he should say so. The mufti was fond of Adnan, and therefore persuaded to remain our friends, then announced he had many more mosques to worry about. He moaned and muttered behind our backs, but when he met us he greeted us warmly.

‘Distinguished sisters, brothers and friends, Mr Reeves, our respected Dean – we are all eager to put efforts in the project,’ the mufti began. ‘I am happy to see Anwar Azimov from the OHR. He has not yet been to Banja Luka, but we are in no doubt of his good wishes. Glad to see the representative of the Turkish Embassy. Mr Erozan has promised significant support for the mosque and other buildings. There are many more on the UN list. There are the Vakuf mosques, Halad Pasha’s turbe and the Gradiska medressa, but today’s issue is the most important. We are grateful to Mr Reeves. The Soul of Europe is in Europe. We are Europe. Mr Reeves will accompany me to the Begova Mosque after the meeting.’

Everyone introduced themselves, and Omer Visic announced that the mayor of Banja Luka now agreed to the rebuilding of the mosque. This represented a complete change of heart from our first meeting with Mayor Davidovic, two years earlier, when he had implied there should be no mosques in Banja Luka at all, since hardly any Muslims lived there. The Coventry Consultation really had made a difference. Now the mayor was actively participating in creating the conditions to reach our objective. He told Omer Visic that the next meeting of the committee should be in Banja Luka, saying: ‘The spirit of the soul of Europe should be transferred to the town of Banja Luka, which one day will have the Ferhadija Mosque shining brightly in full glory.’

We were all surprised at these words, from the person who had, till recently, been one of the project's fiercest adversaries.

Imam Alemic spoke about being in Banja Luka when the mosque was destroyed, and how much he wanted to be able to worship in it again.

Meliha Filipovic shared her relief that we had reached this day when things could be finalised and the project set on its way.

Resad Salihovic said it had been a difficult moment for him to be appointed to the board of the Islamic Council in Banja Luka after the death of Mufti Halilovic, but he assured everyone he would remain there to help us achieve the goals set by the committee.

Rusmir Cacic from Mostar hoped the Ferhadija Mosque would become a bridge of friendship between the communities of Banja Luka, just like the bridge in Mostar. But, despite the bridge, it was well known that relations between Catholics and Muslims in Mostar remained as hostile as during the war. Nor would they improve. In 2014 divisions are more entrenched.

Professor Hamidovic rounded off the introductions by informing the meeting that he had brought together a group of architects and specially picked students, to learn about old traditional methods of building, involving them in the metaphysical issues around the particular Ottoman style in Bosnia.

Resad Salihovic gave the first presentation and began by reminding everyone of the shocking fact that between the 9th of May and September 1993 all sixteen mosques in Banja Luka were systematically destroyed.

The Islamic community began to apply for reconstruction of one mosque on the 11th November, in the same year, and had been applying in vain ever since.

Resad painstakingly listed the dates of the correspondence, year after year, renewing the requests. They had many meetings with Milorad Dodik, then Prime Minister

between 1998 and 2001, again in 2006 and presently as I write this, President with no likelihood of being succeeded for many years. He became the favourite of the international community, because he belonged to a different nationalist party from that of Radovan Karadjic.

After receiving dozens of complaints, and feeling the international community breathing down his neck, Milorad Dodik, a shrewd politician, eventually permitted fences and gates to be put round the sites of several mosques. In 2002 he even granted urban permission to rebuild fifteen mosques in the region: but so many discrepancies in the wording created insurmountable obstacles, questions such as: should the minarets be made of stone or wood? 'Politics are created to prevent,' commented Resad. Dodik was playing for time, as he would do successfully in the following years, to fulfil his aim of separating the Republika Srpska from the rest of Bosnia.

Resad reported some good news. Permission had been granted for the building of the Stuplje mosque, and the foundations were already being laid. Work was beginning on another mosque in Celje, and roofs would be ready in a matter of months on mosques which had not been completely demolished in the war. As for the Ferhadija Mosque, the authorities' plans to build tall offices on the carsija, market area, surrounding the site, threatened to derail our project.

The Turkish ambassador's deputy wondered why there was a problem if permits had been issued. Resad explained that on the issue of permits only one mosque had a construction, as distinct from an urban permit: a delaying tactic.

Anwar Azimov reminded everyone of Annex 8 which stipulated that all mosques be rebuilt, and that the OHR would help facilitate this process. Why did the Islamic community not take matters further? 'What are the plans for the mosque? Where are they?' he demanded with some exasperation.

It turned out that the issue of delay lay with the Islamic community as well as the municipal authorities.

The architectural team had indeed submitted plans for other mosques to the Urban Ministry in Banja Luka, and had been told that permission would only be given if the designs complied with Annex 8, which stipulated that the destroyed mosques should be rebuilt, as they used to be, in the Ottoman style. Since the majority of funds being offered for the reconstruction came from the Saudis, who stipulated the mosques should be built in Saudi style, the Islamic community found itself in an impasse.

Deflecting argument, Mufti Camdzic raised the matter of those mosques in the region not on the Annex 8 list: could they be rebuilt.? Anwar Azimov answered him by saying they would be considered, so long as they were in the Ottoman style.

Sabira Husedzinovic described the Saudi mosques as alien to Bosnian culture and tradition: 'The original Stuplje Mosque was a treasure, and now destroyed,' she said. 'I want to ask the Islamic community to think carefully, and provide implementation that avoids the building of pseudo-mosques that never existed. Reconsider the issue.'

She feared that a Saudi style 'pseudo-mosque' placed on the site of the old Stuplje mosque would discourage the Republika Srpska from issuing permits. Ottoman style mosques would be more welcome, as part of Bosnia's heritage.

No one mentioned that the Saudi style mosques made people think of Islamic extremists, alarming Orthodox and Catholics with the threat of terrorism. This highlighted the importance of the 'look' of buildings and what they implied, psychologically and symbolically. Anything foreign to Bosnian culture could be construed as a political threat. Rebuilding a precious heritage, valued by all the communities in the past, might give a more conciliatory message. The meeting avoided the issue as to why Saudi style mosques were being built everywhere in the first place.

Donald, as chairman of the meeting, picked up on the impatience of the Islamic community, particularly towards the ambivalent attitudes of the international community, not just difficulties with permits. He proposed another meeting to discuss how to create productive conversations with the authorities. We needed to stop and change the present state of communication by confrontation, in which the Islamic community regularly submitted proposals, and the authorities automatically ignored them. The Soul of Europe would help prepare conditions for productive conversations.

The discussion moved to technical matters about structures that could withstand earthquakes, and also the issue of ruins of Christian churches being discovered in the foundations of destroyed mosques. Professor Hamidovic spoke about archaeological digs he authorized, introducing sonars, and that so far no trace of other buildings were found beneath the foundations, even though Catholics were making claims. If anything turned up on the site of the Ferhadija, all work should be halted until it had been thoroughly investigated.

Above all, the professor wanted the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque to be a 'school' example in its approach, so other heritage monuments could learn how such a project should be carried out. The memories of the people of Banja Luka must be taken into account, and the return of those scattered across the world encouraged. A school of masonry would be established in conjunction with the rebuilding, as at the Mostar Bridge: a project supported by the World Bank with this stipulation.

Ruzmir Cusic made only a few comments on the technicalities, assuming the experts would do their best: for instance ensuring the use of old materials, not concrete. He emphasised the importance of creating a 'good atmosphere': the mosque should be a symbol of reconciliation, not a threat. He remembered being born and brought up in a place where church bells sounded along with the call of the muezzin. We needed to

have the full support of the majority of people in Banja Luka. 'Safe peace' would prevent obstacles and barriers to the progress of the work. No efforts could be big enough to achieve this aim. Like the Mostar Bridge, the Ferhadija Mosque had to be a symbol of new life together.

The Turkish ambassador's deputy repeated his question about why the Islamic community found it so hard to insist on the implementation of Annex 8. He had clearly been told to press this issue, because the ambassador knew it had everything to do with Saudi funds, and the close relations between them and the Reis, who was therefore keeping a distance from Turkey and Ottoman traditions.

However much Anwar Azimov kept repeating that no municipal permits were necessary, just rehabilitation permits, and that the OHR would always be ready to help, he also knew that obstruction came from the Islamic community, not just the local authorities, because the community itself was not complying with Annex 8.

Annex 8 became the focus of discussion.

Amra Hamijedovic, a stickler for rules and regulations, explained how the Annex 8 commission took responsibility for all the heritage monuments in Bosnia. 'These gems are completely destroyed,' she reminded the meeting. 'Ruins and ashes. Trust needs to be rebuilt where human dignity was destroyed.'

She gave an example of a project at Stolac which started badly then corrected itself.

Catholics had been putting obstacles in the way of Muslims trying to rebuild the Cacija Mosque in Stolac. The OHR tried and failed to create a good climate. The permission took a year to come through, but, as the date to start work approached, the Catholics insisted there had been a church on that site. They gave this as a reason for the mosque's destruction. Bishop Peric inflamed the situation by stating that Catholics would feel threatened by the mosque. He then scared Muslims with veiled threats and

warnings not to return where they were not wanted, and should not be. The community divided, no clear proposal emerged, and the project stalled.

Then the Muslims of Stolac tried a different process. While following all legal procedures they took it slowly step by step. First they began to clear the site. A professor announced: ‘This is the first day of my return to my town. I feel at home. Everyone treats me with respect.’

On the seventh day, three Catholics arrived to give Muslims information about the site of landfills where the original stones of the mosque could be found. Since then, the mosque collected funds world-wide, asking refugees, friends and interested people, and drawing up a subscription list.

Now the mosque needed just a roof and a minaret. Refugees were beginning to return to Stolac.

The group recognized similarities with the Ferhadija. However, Imam Alemic struck a sour note, saying there could be no guarantee of protection for the rebuilt mosque. People were telling him on the streets of Banja Luka: ‘You can rebuild your mosque, but we will just destroy it again.’

‘Precisely that matter needs addressing,’ announced Donald and made the following points:

‘The Ferhadija Mosque is a European project. The Reis appointed me vice-president. This is an example of Christian Islamic collaboration. It is an international project. We will have international patrons, such as the Prince of Wales. Those who oppose the mosque will have to reckon with this international dimension. We are now getting European support from governments and communities. The process and preparation must be correct; then funding will come.’

The project needs to develop professionally, taking into account costing and time scale. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway asked hard questions, so we need written material for a proper fund raising process.

Then we must go around Europe with a study and a project proposal. The Prince of Wales is now waiting to see both. The committee needs to decide on this issue.

We must avoid a repetition of the May 7 incident: no more protests and violence at the site of the mosque. The Soul of Europe is committed to confidence-building measures. The rebuilding of the mosque will encourage the return of people to Banja Luka, so we need to encourage the regeneration of the economy, education, culture, young people, and the environment. We are not an aid or development agency. We are concerned with developing civil society in all its aspects.

Popular events, including a pop concert for young people, and also more elaborate projects, need to be organized. Just now, eight teachers have left Banja Luka to visit England and establish exchanges between schools. Also a representative of the International Development Consortium is coming to Banja Luka to help with inward investment.

The Soul of Europe intends to establish good relations with the Catholic Church, with Bishop Komarica in particular.

The Soul of Europe will also help the Orthodox Church, though we are making only slow progress with Bishop Jefrem. But we have good relations with him, and are confident that both Catholics and Orthodox will support the Ferhadija Mosque project.

We need to take an integrated approach. The effect will be to shame those people who want to destroy the mosque. It will not be in their interests to destroy it. A proper process with the Ferhadija Mosque at its heart will be a way to success. We are determined. You know that, God knows it. Enchalah! The Soul of Europe is a

powerless organization. We are not the United Nations. We have nothing to lose.

Besides which, the Muslim communities in Europe want to visit Banja Luka to show their solidarity. Young people in particular.

The project proposal is now a priority.

Finally we have to learn from the example of Stolac.’

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Valery Perry then spoke on behalf of the European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI, describing the positive steps made in Mostar, where she had organized a workshop on the Annex 8 issues. Thirty five people came from all over Bosnia to establish a country wide association of experts to facilitate monitoring implementation of Annex 8, and to develop concrete projects with NGOs and children.

Sabira Husedzinovic ended the formal part of the meeting by proposing the founding of a small society for reconciliation of Serbs, Croats and Muslims who would work on creating the friendlier climate being discussed, represent all the communities and control projects of reconstruction of heritage monuments belonging to all sides.

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Donald did his best to keep up with Mufti Camdzic, who was rushing through the streets of Sarajevo to be in time to attend worship at the Begova Mosque. Donald listened to beautiful chanting, while crowds of people young and old, praying and kneeling together, stared at him in astonishment, but with friendly smiles. After the worship, Donald bumped into a delighted Suljman Tihic, who had just been elected to succeed the recently deceased Alija Izetbegovic as leader of the SDA party, the Party of Democratic Action in Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing the Muslim majority.

Meanwhile Adnan prepared a group of journalists for a press conference, deploying his skills to ensure adequate coverage in the next day’s papers. Highlights of the interview with Donald and the mufti would later be shown on prime-time TV news.

The journalists hung around patiently while Mirjana Pejic played songs from the shows in a cautious manner on an out of tune piano. Roy Wilson, who had silently attended the morning meeting, raised his eyebrows at her efforts, while sharing with us his usual cynical reservations about the Republika Srpska politicians.

The Foreign Office had decided to send him to Yerevan in Armenia, appointing him number two at the embassy there. Always supporting our work, nothing was too much trouble, such as personally arranging passports and visas for all the participants from Bosnia at the Coventry Consultation, driving us around, introducing us to anyone relevant, cheering us up, and entertaining us generously at his house. Most of all he gave crucial insight into the political situation in the Republika Srpska, sharing his disgust at the inability, or lack of interest, by the international community in dealing with the corruption and lack of cooperation.

‘Bosnia is one of the most important countries in the world,’ declared Donald, startling the group of young, bored and disinterested interviewers out of their lethargy at the start of the press conference.

Their faces expressed weary cynicism with the state of the country and the world. Nothing they reported would make a difference to the general corruption. ‘Am I mad?’ asked Donald. They did not respond on air, but came up afterwards to assure him of their support, and with questions they had been told to ask by their Serb-run papers: ‘Why were we working in Banja Luka? Where did our funding come from? Why weren’t we rebuilding Orthodox churches?’

Donald described the Soul of Europe’s chance visit to Banja Luka, which established the main purpose of our work: seeking justice on behalf of all communities.

‘After September 11 there has to be somewhere in the world where Christianity and Islam can work together,’ he told them. ‘We hope to bring Orthodox and Islamic

experts together. That is the benefit of being an Anglican. I belong to none of the big battalions which divide and rule your country.’

The papers next day reported none of this, but quoted Mufti Camdzic’s claim that the Prince of Wales would support the project financially. He had jumped the gun and we could only hope the Prince did not hear of this surprising news.

During the interview, Donald, Mufti Camdzic, Professor Hamidovic, and Adnan, sat tightly together at a narrow table with Mirjana Pejic at one end. She translated, allowing Adnan to attend the meeting in his own right. Mirjana looked ill at ease.

During lunch she conversed with the handsome young imam, but managed to offend him, as he politely introduced himself, by laughingly responding: ‘Oh your Muslim names, I can never remember them, you all sound the same!’ This turned out to be her last assignment for us, and she handed in her notice when we returned to Banja Luka.

Important decisions about the Ferhadija Mosque project were made during lunch.

Before that, Sabira Husedzinovic focused on the main issues, demanding to know who was responsible for carrying out decisions made by the committee, its legal position and what structures were in place to take matters further.

Donald raised the issue of tendering plans for rebuilding the mosque, which elicited the telling response from Meliha Filipovic that the Islamic community had no experience of tendering. The community also had no funds.

‘We need a proper financial structure,’ declared Professor Hamidovic.

Everyone welcomed Donald’s proposal to appoint a director of the project, someone with experience to steer it to a successful conclusion, and he promised to start raising money for such a person. He delivered on this promise, but the problems, both political and financial, would continue for some years.

It took time to set up the structure and meanwhile we had to contend with the fears, suspicions and doubts of both Muslims and Serbs: issues we had become familiar with over the last two years. But the future of the mosque now looked more secure.

Adnan had organized a successful day. It came to an end with a prepared lunch at the Writers Club, our favourite restaurant in Sarajevo, which specialized in Muslim cuisine with its subtle flavours. After starters of cheese pies, herbs and smoked fish, the main courses consisted of minced lamb in filo pastry, crisp chicken roulades, shashliks in sauce, stewed ladyfingers and other vegetables, followed by figs, melons, apple slices, nectarines sprinkled with lemon juice, halva, and walnut honey cakes.

People at the meal joked about the widely differing quotes they received from the Serb and Muslim builders for constructing the metal boundary fence around the site of the Ferhadija Mosque. The Muslims quoted fifty thousand marks, the Serbs only seventeen thousand marks. So employing Serb builders had not only been an example of inter-ethnic cooperation, but also sound business.

THE IMAM'S TOMB

AUTHORITIES AND NGOS: STARTING THE PARTNERSHIP FORUM

Listening to Donald's presentation, Srdjan Glamocic looked grimly across the table at us, his expression seeming to say: 'No mosque! No way!'

We had at last, after this meeting, come face to face with the man who, as head of the Ministry for Urban Planning in Banja Luka, held the key to granting permission for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque.

The window of his office in the municipal headquarters along the corridor a few doors down from Mayor Davidovic, looked out on to the unfinished Orthodox cathedral: the newly cast bells, now decorated with ribbons, squatting on the main

steps. A large oil painting of St Sava stood propped against the wall in a corner of the office.

‘My department works on giving permission for rebuilding all mosques in this region,’ said Srdjan Glamocic as soon as Donald had finished speaking. ‘First I want to stress that, personally, my department, which is responsible for the whole region of Banja Luka, we have no intention of putting obstacles in the way of rebuilding any mosque. We have always had good contact and cooperation with the Islamic community.’

This reminded us of our first meeting with the mayor who, after informing us of how well Serbs and Muslims got on, declared that since Muslims were such a small minority now, begging a painful question, they had no need of any mosque at all.

‘Following requests,’ Srdjan Glamocic continued, ‘we have issued all fifteen urban permits for the destroyed mosques in Banja Luka. There is now a construction permit for the Stuplje mosque, and we are issuing a permit for the mosque in Celje. But the Islamic community needs to follow procedures. In ten days we can give a permit. We have already given one for the Ferhadija, but we are waiting for the documentation to be completed. So far there has been no request for a construction permit. Finally, I have to tell you that the authority to give permission for three of the mosques is ministerial, not departmental. In cooperation with the OHR, and new laws concerning human rights, the decision about the three mosques under the jurisdiction of UNESCO comes under another ministry, the Ministry for Construction.’

Banja Luka is a city smaller than Reading in England, and yet contained as many ministries and departments as the capital city of a large nation state.

The historic mosques, the three Srdjan Glamocic referred to, including the Ferhadija and Arnaudija, were an embarrassment for the Republika Srpska. The ruling nationalist party had deliberately destroyed them. So the various departments and

ministries passed the problem between them to avoid making a decision. This explained the frustration and impatience of the High Representative, who kept insisting on the legal requirements for the mosques to be rebuilt, and the despair of the Islamic community, which kept making applications, that were then passed around and ignored. Both the OHR and Muslims were constantly being obstructed with orders to go elsewhere for the permits along the lines of: ‘This isn’t our department: and anyway your documentation is incorrect.’

The final straw was being told solemnly and piously by the authorities in Banja Luka that: ‘These are legal requirements. It is the law.’ This begged the familiar question as to why the mosques were destroyed in the first place: had that been the law too?

‘The other mosques are under my remit,’ Srdjan Glamocic told us smugly, implying that he was relieved not to have the responsibility for the hot potatoes. ‘We’ve done our bit for the Ferhadija,’ he added and looked content to have washed his hands of the matter.

Donald paid no attention to what seemed to be the meeting being brought to an early conclusion.

‘When the mosque was destroyed, the stones were removed,’ he carried on in a determined, steady tone, much to Srdjan Glamocic’s dismay. ‘As soon as possible it is necessary to identify the location, to retrieve them, dry and prepare them for the rebuilding. We need to find a site where this can take place. Is that your department? Is that your decision?’

‘Yes it comes under my authority,’ replied Srdjan Glamocic, unable to divest himself of all his responsibilities on the matter of the Ferhadija Mosque.

‘It is early days yet,’ continued Donald, ‘But when we appoint a director of the project, he or she will put the project out to tender: who will do the construction work etc., and the issue of the stones will be top of the list. Please see him or her when he or

she is appointed to discuss the project from the planning perspective, so lines of communication are properly established and remain open. It is important, with such an international project, that lines between the local authorities and the project are kept totally open.’

‘Of course,’ said Srdjan Glamocic. ‘The city of Banja Luka will be involved with all contacts, and also in the realization of the reconstruction. Most probably Banja Luka will appoint a coordinator for the Ferhadija Mosque project.’

At least the authorities were accepting the fact of the reconstruction now.

‘From my experience in England,’ Donald went on, ‘a major project can lose touch with local authorities, and problems arise. We are also raising money for the owners of the local cafés and shops to see how to improve their facilities. This may not come under your jurisdiction, but we want to make the surroundings as beautiful as possible, in the way shop owners would like. We are looking a year ahead.’

Donald tried carefully not to spell out one of the important reasons for this concern about making local shop owners happy: to prevent the implementation of the plan, eventually, to build multi-storey flats and offices all round the mosque. If the locals liked the improvements to their businesses, now Serb-owned, then they might veto these proposed massive buildings, which would ruin their livelihood as well as obliterate view of the mosque.

However Srdjan Glamocic guessed Donald’s purpose and told us grimly: ‘The area is in process of regulatory plans. We’ll see what that looks like after the Assembly procedures, and hopefully these plans will be adopted in five to six months. Then we can discuss according to the urban plans of Banja Luka. This area is a zone for business and commerce. It was a plan dating from 1979, going back many years, and not carried out because of the war.’ He did not mention that the communists controlled the authorities then, a time when all the religions were oppressed, so the

area around the mosque, being the city centre, would have been seen as the commercial hub of Banja Luka, regardless of the religious significance of the mosque itself, or the feelings of worshippers.

‘There will be public debate about the height of the minaret,’ Donald continued, knowing that these arguments were already operating as an obstruction tactic by the authorities. ‘I hope there will be good lines of communication.’

‘After May 7 last year,’ Srdjan Glamocic responded, ‘a bad picture of Banja Luka was formed. It became a political issue. Maybe the ceremony took place too early. Obviously today mosques can be built without problems; not only here in Banja Luka, but all around. I have been asked if there would be problems about the fence, but no, nothing happened. No politics, just normal procedure. They asked. We gave permission. It was a good start, a good procedure. We prepared a list of mosques, gave permissions and solutions to any problems. There is also a list of complaints, mainly about the height of the minarets, or the kind of materials to be used. At the time of application the community was not sure about materials. At a meeting with the OHR, we agreed in principle to keep the same materials as before. As for the height of minarets, the height should remain the same, as before the war. Before the war, some of the mosques had reconstruction plans. We agreed in principle to all objects with permits for reconstruction. We accept the height of the minaret as before the war. In principle, that was agreed.’

Muslims are still not permitted to build minarets in many European countries, allegedly to avoid ‘offending’ Christian sensibilities, but in fact to remind Muslims: you are aliens in this continent, and you must accept your second class status.

If Banja Luka, especially after ethnic cleansing, could welcome the reconstruction of mosques as they were, then the city would be an example to the rest of Europe on the issue of religious and inter-ethnic tolerance.

Dragana at the Nansen Dialogue Centre, where we went next to discuss ways of cooperating on projects, assured us that levels of tolerance in Banja Luka were improving, despite the violent protest at the site of the Ferhadija Mosque on May 7. This event so upset all the Serb staff that they immediately organized meetings and public discussions to respond to the crisis, but these received little media attention, even though many young people attended.

We spoke about the need for those who had suffered in the war to gather and speak about their experiences, in order to work for truth and reconciliation. However the Hague Tribunal avoided supporting such initiatives, because these might interfere with the task of arresting criminals.

We saw our task as cooperating with NGOs like the Nansen Dialogue Centre to help build civil society. We would work in the outlying villages, like Presnace, as well as in Banja Luka, on peace building, the environment, and public dialogue on issues of justice and combating Islamophobia. Despite Dragana's assurance that the situation had improved, we doubted that victims could speak freely while their former oppressors and persecutors still lived unpunished in the neighbourhood.

NGOs dislike cooperating with each other for fear of losing their individual funding. Roy Wilson, whom we met later that day, put his finger on another problem: when it came to results, such as the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque: who would take responsibility for the 'parcelling out of kudos'?

Donald proposed setting up a centre for democracy, run like the deanery of a cathedral, with NGOs working independently but knit loosely together. He proposed chairing a public discussion before the election. Roy informed us that public debate in the Balkans normally consisted of politicians appearing on television delivering speeches. Donald put forward the English model of *Any Questions*, in which

politicians and civil leaders sit on a panel and are questioned by the public. Roy laughed out loud at the impossibility of this simple democratic procedure taking place in the Republika Srpska, where election campaigning took the form of delivery of kilo packs of smuggled sugar, to persuade likely voters a day before polling.

However, according to Roy, the UK and the US were now committing large amounts of money to improve the democratic process in Bosnia, making sure people knew what the parties represented, and giving fair space to all of them.

The reality of political life in Bosnia was still corruption. The most influential nationalists, now Kalinic, Karadjic's mouthpiece, and later Dodik, ran the Republika Srpska like a private fiefdom. Thus Momo Mandic, brother of the minister of justice, had just been kidnapped for a million dollars in Sarajevo. Momo was one of the chief smugglers in Bosnia. His brother, Mlandj Mandic, a 'total thug' according to Roy Wilson, owned a Mercedes, a Jaguar and BMW, among six cars, apparently on a Bosnian minister's salary, which barely covered the expense of a Volkswagen. When Roy challenged Kalinic to arrest Momo on corruption charges, Kalinic responded evasively with: 'He's not that bad. His staff like him.' To which Roy remarked: 'They're wise!'

Roy advised us to capitalise on Vice-President Cavic, likely to be the new president of the Republika Srpska, get him on side, give him an 'honorary role' in the Ferhadija Mosque project, and so hold him to what he promised at the Coventry Consultation.

'You will have a president who came to Coventry,' Roy told us encouragingly.

It would be Ian Cliff, our ambassador in Sarajevo, who brought about a significant meeting with Vice-President Cavic, soon to be elected President, that strengthened the foundation of the project.

KAIROS: THE RIGHT MOMENT

We returned later in the day for another and longer meeting with the Nansen Dialogue Centre.

There were eight centres throughout the Balkans, each carrying out specific objectives in relation to the region, and implementing the organization's main purpose of promoting dialogue as a means of non-violent communication.

Dialogue took the form of round tables and events, appealing to younger people, such as alternative radio and TV stations broadcasting nationwide, exploring subjects like the role of religion and issues of conflict resolution, and human rights, and supporting campaigns such as fighting racism. Exhibitions, music and drama under the banner of Culturemania tackled issues with a different approach.

Three years later we would witness a successful example of such an approach in the region of Prijedor when the Nansen Dialogue Centre of Banja Luka organized a witty and hard-hitting youth theatre production, involving young people from every background, and took it round local villages, to the delight of children and adults alike. The comedy dealt with the issues of ethnic segregation and had everyone laughing at a series of enthusiastically and well-performed sketches, illustrating the absurdity of the conflict, summed up in a repeated tableau of people sharing a lift, all standing stiffly on either side of a carefully marked dividing line, one side for Serbs, the other for Muslims and the Croats not sure where to put themselves. The performance ended with a piece of buffoonery that deliberately appealed to the lowest common denominator, and united all audiences: in the final lift tableau the ever growing crush of bodies suddenly had to cope with one of them having just farted.

Four people worked full time and two part-time at the Banja Luka Centre, managed by Dragana. They provided space for dialogue and information, but admitted difficulty in motivating people: no change after six years.

At the meeting to discuss ways of working together Donald stressed the success of the Coventry Consultation, in which our access to the movers and shakers of Banja Luka gave us an advantage over other NGOs. He introduced Dejan and Majda, and talked about the survey they would carry out and discussed projects on which they could cooperate with the Nansen Dialogue Centre. This included a truth and reconciliation dialogue in small villages, low key as well as public, so as not to frighten people, all of which fitted in with the aims of the civic forum.

Serbs kept making remarks along the lines of: 'If the Muslims return, Serbs will not be able to breathe.' There had to be opportunity for everyone, including Serbs, to express their feelings. These fears could then be articulated, discussed, and seen to be baseless. When the Serb teachers from Banja Luka visited St Peter's School in Exeter, Donald spoke openly and forcefully about the mosque. The teachers winced at first, but the more the mosque was talked about, the less antagonistic they became. Keeping silent on the issue only reinforced prejudices. People did not get an opportunity to change their minds.

Another joint project could be a series of 'story-telling' to go alongside the Hague Tribunal: speaking the truth, learning from example, such as the South African and Northern Ireland experiences, situations quite different from Bosnia, along the lines of: 'They did this. What would be right for Bosnia?'

'We feel a little lonely,' Dragana told us. 'We are pioneers. We did not know how to react to the events on May 7. We tried to tackle the issues by organizing lectures, but people were not ready to talk about them. We need to open up the issues, talk about the war, the women raped, etc, to create a social environment to make talk safe. We have to open up painful issues. Truth is important; we need to facilitate and speed the process. We have trained people for this, but we need help. We need structural support. We should create a project together. We need to facilitate dialogue between

people by a locally trained person. Help us with moral support, more training, follow up work and more funds.’

Stunned by all these difficult issues crowding the agenda, and depressed by the repetition of the word ‘need’, we could only offer help in reflecting on them. Then Adnan asked about the involvement of the university, teachers and students. Before joining the Soul of Europe he had spent several years organizing youth groups, also with support from the Norwegian government, and he spoke from direct experience of the needs and concerns of young people.

Adnan wanted to know whether public events had taken place with students; what subjects were covered, and if any dealt with reconciliation and human rights. But there seemed to be no trust in public events yet. People were afraid to speak openly. We could start with seminars and TV talk shows. Adnan stressed the importance of dealing with the fact that six per cent of young people, the best educated ones, wanted to leave the country. They had diplomas, but these were not valid in other parts of Europe. What would happen to Bosnia once the best trained minds had left?

‘People cannot find a common interest,’ declared Adnan, ‘but we will provide space for such discussion. It is time to discuss issues of the past.’

‘It is not the right time,’ countered Dragana, contradicting what she had said earlier about the urgency of dealing with these issues, and now echoing the cautious words of all the Serb politicians we met in Bosnia. ‘We don’t need this public process,’ she went on. ‘Seminars are safer spaces to share what is important to people. It fulfils a psychological need. The present situation cannot be changed quickly. Our way is educational. Social changes are slow, up to one to two years.’

Donald seized on this point. ‘Grass roots, psychological and educational, take time. These words are important for the Ferhadija project. We need to develop activities

which build trust and use the skills and resources of the Nansen Dialogue Centre. We must help each other out. Kairos not chronos: the time is now.’

He then attacked the international community’s immorality in its indifference, cynicism and cowardice towards Bosnia. This became our perpetual chorus of complaint throughout the following years. Then he declared: ‘We need to look above the parapet. Problems need to be addressed among ordinary people.’

‘This raises an interesting question,’ Dragana said in response. ‘Shifting to social changes, people are not used to recognising their own capabilities. You are saying no waiting or postponing? At a certain point you can’t put your head on the wall foolishly. Everything needs to be planned and prepared for.’

In our impatience to start the process of public acknowledgment of all that had happened recently, we were failing to recognize that young people at the Nansen Dialogue Centre lived in Banja Luka, and regularly, day by day, had to interact with people who still held old prejudices.

‘Find people to help from among ordinary people and other NGOs,’ advised Donald.

‘There is an awareness of common interest,’ commented Dragana. ‘People do care about this joint environment. No one was prepared for the 7th of May.’

Dejan backed her up saying: ‘There was no community development to prepare for the violence. Solid ground needs preparation.’

Finally Dragana admitted sadly that there had been no success with cooperation between NGOs: too much competition based on shortage of funding.

The violence did not happen only on May 7. We witnessed an inter-ethnic fight outside the Vidovic Hotel that night.

First Adnan talked to a sad young Muslim staying at the hotel. The man had problems reclaiming his home, still occupied by Serbs. The police were unwilling to

move the squatters who had no intention of leaving. The squatters would have had to return to the small town of Glamoc high in the mountains of central Bosnia, a remote, poverty stricken region. The Muslim had no choice but to stay at the hotel, paying every night, waiting patiently for a solution to his problems, and never giving up hope of being able to move back to his home.

In the middle of the night a noisy fight broke out next to a garage behind the hotel. A Muslim family was trying to enter their house, but Serbs occupying it ganged up on them. Fists flew, with loud shouts, and no police came.

Meanwhile television channels were gleefully reporting a raid by SFOR on Karadjic's house in Banja Luka. He was not there, but the soldiers confiscated his pc. Mrs Karadjic gave a light-hearted interview, joking about the way they broke into her house: 'I would have given them the key. They only had to ask me.' This mocking of the international community provided good publicity for the nationalists in the run up to the election, and could not have been better orchestrated for them by SFOR.

Elsewhere on the news, Wolfgang Petritsch, looking prim and scared, gave testimony at the Hague Tribunal. Milosevic, in the dock, sneered with contempt.

Television in the Republika Srpska consisted mostly of broadcasts of long debates in the National Assembly: grey-haired, stocky middle aged men giving long speeches, while everyone looked bored. This channel ignored the news in the rest of Bosnia. Weather forecasts covered a region of Europe with at first unrecognizable national borders until I realized the Republika Srpska had been detached from the Federation and joined to Serbia, blocking the rest of Bosnia out. The map indicated the longing of Bosnian Serbs to reject reality, and belong to Serbia.

Turbo folk music dominated another TV channel. Again, silver haired, stocky middle aged men, surrounded by gyrating dancing girls, sang to a backing of guitars, violins and accordions. Occasionally, women modelling themselves on Ceca (Tsetsa),

the Serbian pop star widow of the assassinated warlord Arkan, waved arms languidly, while flicking long black hair out of their faces, and sang hoarsely about their faithless lovers: ‘Why are you not having my child? Why did you choose another, when you could have had me?’

A channel from Croatia showed old American sitcoms and subtitled Hollywood films.

At one point I found myself mesmerised by an episode of *Baywatch*, in which a plane crashing into the ocean momentarily interrupted the main business of a thwarted love affair between the main hero and the slimmest woman in the cast. After an elaborately staged plunge into the water, bodies began to be attacked by sharks. Then a handful of survivors, who happened to be the most attractive passengers, including a young pregnant mother, found themselves crushed in an air pocket. The one with the trimmest body, silkiest skin and roundest breasts turned out to be the rescuing hero’s former girlfriend. Despite the horror, attention focused on that storyline. The crassness of this plot collision addled my brain momentarily, and made me question the relevance and impact of our work in Bosnia. Had the war and its horrors simply been an unpleasant distraction? Who cares about victims and destruction, so long as we can be assured that the beautiful and famous are kept happy and safe?

THE START: PARTNERS AND ‘MOBA’

Imagine a town missing half its population, ethnically cleansed: killed, expelled or forced out. People from the criminal but victorious side flood in from other regions to take over the homes of those they expelled. Imagine a ruined economy and infrastructure. The economy is further crippled by the town’s bad reputation internationally. The people in charge are those who carried out or went along with the ethnic cleansing, which ruined the town’s reputation in the world. These people are

resistant to advice. They consider that they did nothing wrong, so they also feel outraged at being judged. This is a place without justice, where people fear for the present and the future, and where the authorities continue to keep faith with their nationalist cause, which led to war, destruction and murder.

Apart from enduring the ongoing psychological trauma of war among the whole population, for the aggressor group as well as the victims, the society has to survive and compete in a world driven by the market, in which hard-nosed business, solvency and gilt-edged security matter more than pity and support for poor and crippled economies.

Despite Bosnia's mineral and agricultural resources, few people trusted those who ran the country. Even when an affluent and powerful global company like Mittal Steel, not squeamish about history and circumstances, invested in the mine of Omarska and the steel works of Zenica, both industries having collapsed after the war, it immediately found itself in thrall to the blackmail tactics of the local nationalist leaders. Businesses like Mittal Steel relied on the cooperation of mafia-type bosses, such as Mayor Pavic of Prijedor, who had the main politicians of the Republika Srpska in his pocket. Business automatically puts profits before ethics. Mittal Steel brought jobs to a few Serbs in Bosnia, and left others to deal with the lack of democracy, fairness and justice for all the communities.

What chance for a civic forum in these circumstances?

Looking back, our efforts were at best quixotic.

The tragedy remains for the people who live there and hope to improve the situation, only to discover that the international community is subservient to global business interests. Offering to bring capital to an impoverished country, these mighty internationals fear, tolerate and are in thrall to the nationalist leaders who run the

place. Meanwhile, they mouth empty platitudes about the ‘need for democratic process’.

It is in respect for the tragedy these people suffer that I write about our failed attempt to establish a civic forum in Banja Luka. Perhaps lessons can be learned, as they say. In fact, a fundamental change in world thinking needs to happen, along the lines of the Occupy protest movements, now mushrooming everywhere as I write. No one likes to read about failure, let alone write about their own. But this is not so much about the Soul of Europe as about the people who put their lives on the line to bring about change, and who were finally and humiliatingly refused the opportunity by the leading officials of the European Union Commission, despite their proposal receiving an 85% approval rating, enough to satisfy any funders. Whereas our project in Omarska ended at least with a symbolic handshake, the Civic Forum petered out, and led to one of the most embarrassingly shameful encounters of our time in Bosnia.

This is all yet to be told. We started naively in high spirits, bearing in mind Ernesto Sabato’s dictum that *only those capable of envisaging utopia will be fit for the decisive battle, that of recovering all the humanity we have lost*, and set about training the staff at Banja Luka, inviting the best experts in their field we could find.

Hilary Oakley, from the International Development Consortium, accompanied us. He helped train Dejan and Majda for the survey: an economic, social and demographic plan of the region. The final report would be presented as a gift to Banja Luka, in the presence of the President, the mayor, and other leaders, as well as representatives from the international community. For us, the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque had to go hand in hand with economic regeneration, setting up of small businesses, and other projects that benefited all ethnic groups.

A skilled fundraiser, Hilary Oakley brought considerable experience and useful lessons on the establishing of a one-stop business centre, where people would come for advice and help with finding loans in Banja Luka.

Dejan and Majda were quick on the uptake and were prepared to spend long hours, without a break, learning about new methodologies and getting to understand the intricacies of producing this kind of analysis. They had begun research, and came up with a few breaks and a number of obstacles. People turned out to be suspicious. Considering that many businesses in the Republika Srpska operated illegally, this came as no surprise.

Dejan and Majda concentrated on three sectors: the economy, youth and NGOs. The environment threw up just one person interested to join the forum: an NGO concerned with cleaning up gardens.

Then the Minister of Education took umbrage because he 'had not been informed of our activities'. We remembered the May 7 demonstrations, and assumed that the openly Serb nationalist ministry, which had encouraged and paid children from the high school to come and throw stones at returning Muslims, did not approve of our work and aims. In a relatively small city like Banja Luka, with pretensions to be a state capital, the less important and influential the office, then the more pompous and disapproving would be the people running it.

Dejan and Majda needed encouragement in the face of these small-minded and petty officials. They began to understand their role as part of the Soul of Europe. We did not run projects. Our objectives consisted of identifying problems and ways of tackling them, then work in collaboration with others who created projects, flag these, and help find people to carry them out.

Dejan and Majda needed to take note of and value their personal curiosity and indignation because these would help identify the main issues. They learned about

developing a partnership office, in which representatives from education, the municipal administration, the chamber of commerce, the religious communities and others would be inspired to join an informal organization. Such forums emerge from institutions not people. Brokering would become important, and for this, Dejan and Majda needed special training. Above all they needed to remember the basic purpose of such a forum: the welfare of Banja Luka. This would help them, when faced with sharp questioning from suspicious interviewees.

Combating corruption is an important benefit of these forums, especially for economies in transition, like the Republika Srpska. No donor can resist a joint proposal from a forum made powerful by all sectors of the community coming together. Lack of investment bedevilled the economy of the Republika Srpska, because of endemic corruption. The transparent processes of a forum offered secure and trusted means of channelling funds to help new businesses.

The virtues of a forum consist of transparency, accountability and equity. This takes time to set up. They depend on finding the right people. This is best achieved by involving only independent people and not the authorities.

Time became the stumbling block with our funders, the Foreign Office, because, as civil servants and politicians, they wanted quick results. Impatience scuppers such a project.

When Hilary and Donald had finished their presentation on how a civic forum works, Dejan, Majda and Adnan suddenly became animated. The principles of such a partnership forum rang bells. There is a Bosnian tradition of such cooperation between all sectors of the community that has operated in the country for centuries. It is called 'moba', and exists mainly in the poor areas of the country, among people who cannot afford to pay for skilled work, and have to rely on neighbours and the rest of the community. The way it works is illustrated memorably in the Hollywood film

Witness directed by Peter Weir, in which all members of an Amish community gather for a whole day to build the barn for a new home. It is a gift of time, labour and skills to a young married couple. Some people supply materials, others the labour, others the refreshment, and so on. The objectives and priorities are clear, followed by the interaction of activities involving the whole community.

The principles of *moba* were well known in Bosnia. They would help establish the forum, because everyone would recognize in it an example of a respected tradition.

Hilary advised speed in establishing the forum by the summer of the next year, and achieving some ‘quick wins’ by the autumn. The experience and success of the Coventry Consultation should be exploited, and people told that the forum was not a tool just for stability, but for long term development.

We agreed on finding short term projects to feed confidence: public meetings on the theme of ‘once upon a time’ in which people from all ethnic communities could tell their stories. We planned seminars and round tables, with outside speakers on inter-religious issues, particularly relations between Islam and Orthodoxy, exhibitions of photographs of old Banja Luka, programs of truth and reconciliation, with community projects and tours of the country.

The exhibition became one of our early successes, but the public meetings, seminars and programs of truth and reconciliation were too big for short-term projects.

As for the one-stop shop which enthused Dejan and Majda, Hilary described it as being an ‘umbrella’ approach: building trust between organizations, sharing information, working with competitors, moving from competition to cooperation. He stressed an important point: all this had to be the initiative of the partnership forum. That would silence the critics. People should be involved proactively from the chamber of commerce. Practically speaking, the one-stop shop meant one person at the end of the phone line, not a row of ten, providing essential services After agreeing

a central phone number, two people would be employed to deal with enquiries, so as not to duplicate services. These would include provision of information forms for setting up businesses, help in assessing their value and finding grants for premises, etc, advice with responding to questions, how to be proactive on site, help in dealing with business difficulties, such as cash flow and debt, finding human resources, help with contracts, and a recruiting process. The one-stop shop would also train people on technical matters: book keeping, computer technology, marketing, business etc., including a diagnostic consultancy, to provide benchmark processes against other standards in the market throughout the rest of Europe, networking and funding.

The partnership forum should reflect the geographical area of the one-stop shop: competitiveness being transformed into cooperation. There would also be the problem of moving the chamber of commerce from its tradition of working within a communist framework. The basic steps involved a 'common' phone, creating a strong brand, having two to three people working on behalf of everyone in a front office.

According to Hilary, after two or three years the international community would not be able to ignore the forum. It takes that time to build trust and move away from perpetual dependency on international aid.

On this issue the Hilary turned out to be as naïve as we were. The forum would not be given this time.

Hilary warned of the difficulty persuading the chamber of commerce, but fresh ideas might convince them, especially given the desperate state of the country's economy.

Earlier Hilary had met Svetlana. The conversation focused on national strategy to end the system of double taxation, under which businesses were crippled by having to pay taxes to both the Republika Srpska and the Bosnia. Still an ardent Serb nationalist, Svetlana refused to countenance ending taxation to the Republika Srpska, an act which would acknowledge being part of just one country, Bosnia. Now

businesses in Banja Luka suffered not only from corruption, but also from having to pay twice over for a nationalist ideology. While the economy suffered unnecessarily from this double whammy, the basic necessities, such as fresh dairy products, fruit and vegetables were being imported from Slovenia: this in Bosnia, a country with the potential of a rich agriculture of its own. Not having suffered catastrophic economic and social breakdown, Slovenia had stolen a march on the other regions of the former Yugoslavia, and taken advantage of the situation, rapidly learning the skills of exporting and marketing, while Bosnia, still reeling from the war, had difficulty standing on its own feet.

The purpose of the partnership forum, and public gatherings, was to educate people, wean them from dependency, become more self-sufficient, and eventually prepare to sit as an equal at the European table.

The subsequent issue that we in our naivety were not prepared for, was the extent of disinterest and even hostility to the idea of a partnership forum in Bosnia from the governments of the rest of Europe, all preferring to keep this small country weak, poor and dependent, easier to control. We had forgotten that a fundamental principle of capitalism, a market-run system, is to create, exploit and preserve inequality.

For this reason and despite all the difficulties we were yet to encounter, we remained determined to continue. We were in effect clearing a path through unknown territory..

THE IMAM'S TOMB

A few yards down from the Vidovic Hotel a small road cuts through houses to the edge of the River Vrbas.

There, on what seemed to be a piece of waste ground stood a headstone, leaning to one side as it sank into the earth and elaborately carved in the shape of a turban, a 'turbe', indicating the tomb of an imam.

A mosque had once stood next to it. Now grass and weeds grew over the foundations and brambles covered the boundary hedge.

Adnan explained to me the reason the imam's tomb had not been destroyed, and stood untouched, surrounded by bushes with a few tall trees behind. Imams, like shamans, were reputed to possess magical powers, and were respected as healers. Christians would go to them for herbs and receive blessings. So the tomb remained standing, a reminder of what had once been there: a memory and accusation. The spot had now accumulated a powerful aura. People avoided entering this piece of land, fearing the consequences of trespassing on sacred ground. The spirit of the dead imam still hovered there.

A large rubbish heap was piled next to the site of the destroyed mosque. Scars of the explosion which brought it down could be seen on the walls of the neighbouring houses. A motor-repair workshop faced the entry to the site. Serb nationalist songs blared aggressively through the open doors from a radio: a defiant gesture at the turbe, solitary in the middle of the weed strewn meadow bordered by impenetrable brambles. Leaves of the trees rustled quietly over the tilted headstone.

While walking with Adnan down to the swirling waters of the Vrbas, and remembering young Mirza, a Bosnian refugee in London, telling me how he used to come and fish along the river, a huge sorrow suddenly engulfed me.

I observed Bosnian Serb children, no older than Mirza had been when their parents drove him out of Banja Luka. They played volleyball, shouting and laughing, running along the riverside.

Looking into the waters of the Vrbas, we noticed shoals of tiny fish in the warm shallows. Beyond them lay stones and boulders from which to dive into the deeper pools as Mirza once used to do. The sun shone bright and hot.

Most of the houses along this stretch of the river had belonged to Muslims. One could tell by the gardens, that had once been diligently cultivated with orchards, vegetable patches and flower beds. The homes were now occupied by Serbs, who neglected the gardens, so they were now overgrown with brambles and weeds. Why would the new owners do this, considering that the gardens could be kept productive? Was this neglect a gesture of defiance: 'Just dare move us on!' Neglect also expressed a sense of not belonging; not being the rightful owners, whose spirits still haunted the area. Everything seemed temporary, waiting for normality, perhaps also justice, as though people were holding their breath in shame and expectation. The sorrow was not felt by me alone. The whole place felt frozen in mourning, even under the bright sunshine and aloud with the happy shouts of playing children.

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In *Shoah*, the documentary film about the aftermath of the Holocaust as it affected victims, perpetrators and bystanders, the director Claude Lanzmann talked with a Polish family, still occupying a house once belonging to Jews they had driven out. At first the family speaks defiantly, in the same self-justifying manner as the Bosnian Serbs who had taken over Muslim houses in Banja Luka: declaring how they had also been driven from their homes. Then sadness and shame overwhelm the conversation, as the father recalls what happened in his town. He does not mention the war directly, or why the Jews were expelled, or how they had been killed. At first he speaks bitterly about the way Jews used to run the town. They had been wealthy, and lived what seemed to him an easy, privileged, and cultured life, while Poles, like him, were poor farmers and manual workers in businesses owned by the Jews. Then, all of a sudden, his eyes fill with sadness as he remembers the beauty of the Jewish women. The expression on the sullen face of his wife, who stands listening in the doorway, hardens, as she looks down on the now broken man, crouching on the steps of the

home they have taken over. He is speaking about the slender hands of the Jewish women, who were not used to rough work; the way they painted, and played the piano. Even though he had helped to destroy them and their way of life, he misses them. Their departure left a bleak gap in the town. The wife looks relieved to have got rid of competition, but the man understands it is about more than sex and wealth. It is about beauty. He expresses the way I felt about Banja Luka: a loss of beauty, a way of life, which had brought refinement to the city. No amount of new, garishly painted Orthodox churches or state-of-the-art business centres could replace that.

I thought of Mirza, his finely moulded features, dark melancholy eyes, thick curly hair and slender athletic physique, which attracted so much attention from the girls at his college in London. He escaped being murdered by the skin of his teeth. Singing in a choir at a concert for Karadjic had not saved him from being driven out of his hometown. This reminded me of another survivor interviewed in *Shoah*, the Jewish boy singer in Auschwitz, who so charmed the guards with his voice that they could not bring themselves to gas him.

Meanwhile, Mirza dreamed of being again by the banks of his beloved Vrbas, fishing and bathing. But his hometown had changed. All the mosques, the familiar city landmarks, had gone. The Orthodox cathedral was rising in their place, imposing another culture and a different feel. He would not recognize his home, which had been neglected and trashed by its new occupiers. An ancient Chinese poem describes the return of a soldier to his home village, after a long military campaign. He cannot recognize anyone, because his family has long since died, and everyone he once knew is no longer there.

Victims and refugees demand justice in vain, and the people, who took over their homes, cannot shake off memories of what happened. Totally destroying all the mosques could not cleanse the place of its history.

There would always be the untouched imam's tomb and a perpetual haunting.

END OF DUST BOOK TWO PART THREE: *FROM THE BANLIEUES OF PARIS
TO THE IMAM'S TOMB*