

DUST

BOOK TWO PART FIVE

LIGHT

Fear breeds fear where knowledge fails.

Ovid Metamorphoses

A dream came to me during the night of the 4th May 2005. We were starting the project to build a memorial at the Omarska iron ore mine which had been used as a killing camp during the war. What we did is described in my book *the white house: From Fear to a Handshake*. In the dream I am sitting with Donald at a table by the sea shore. It is a warm day under a cloudless sky. Suddenly we hear a roar, turn our faces, and look with panic into the blackness of an approaching tsunami.

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Tim Judah, the journalist and political analyst specialising in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the situation in Serbia and Kosovo, writing in 2012 about Bosnia says that there has been no ethnic killing since the end of the war. There is no appetite for fight. People focus on survival in a country where only the corrupt and criminal thrive. Europe is now preoccupied with financial crises that must inevitably lead to a break up of the continent. Whole populations are learning to live with austerity and long-term poverty; the political and social crises in Bosnia are of less concern than ever to the European Union.

On the 28th June 2012 the judge at The Hague Tribunal ruled that the ethnic cleansing of villages and towns in the Prijedor region of Bosnia, judged by the

Bosnians themselves to have been even worse than the Srebrenica massacre, cannot be proved to be genocide. The tribunal exonerated Radovan Karadjic from that crime. If mass expulsions, killings, and razing of whole villages to the ground do not constitute genocide, what does? Edin Ramulic, a survivor and activist for justice in Prijedor, declares: ‘we have no hope now that the Serbs will experience catharsis, and acknowledge that the non-Serbs in Prijedor had been killed, tortured, exterminated, and raped.’ That town’s Mayor, who was directly involved in supervising the massacres, is now able to smile, shake hands with the international community and declare: ‘See: we did nothing wrong. Even The Hague Tribunal says so.’

The ethnic fault lines in Bosnia deepen.

Edin Ramulic makes an important point about the need for catharsis. Other countries, not just Germany, were complicit in the Holocaust. So, after the Second World War, that horror was pushed under the carpet and the world did not go through a catharsis which would have helped people deal with the awfulness of what human beings are capable. This meant that history would repeat itself. This did indeed happen in the Bosnia War. The present lack of catharsis now means that history will most certainly repeat itself again

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This part of my book looks back to the few years when a hope for change that could have lead to catharsis and even reconciliation was snuffed out.

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Before I tell the story, here is another perspective that provides an update.

Our search for understanding and friends took us across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The destruction and rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque remained a seminal project, because it dealt with the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims

the world over. Everything we did focused on this relationship, which seemed to be at the heart of international conflicts.

As I finish editing this book we are planning an event in Germany in 2013 when young people from every ethnic community gather to celebrate being European in art, film, drama, music and dance; this at a time when well-funded far-right groups are working towards a Europe cleansed of foreign elements. Their aim is to return the continent to separate, pure-blooded nation states, and to expel Islam.

Mehmed Belan, my friend in Sarajevo, wrote me recently about the way he views his country:

Older people in Bosnia are nice, they live in an old time when people were still nice, but now people have changed.

They are selfish and full of negativity. In Bosnia if you are rich you have it all: a job, car and everything, otherwise you have little money or nothing; you do not have a job or anything. In my case I dreamed that when I was seventeen years old I would finish college, have a job and be happy. But five years later I lost my home and my dream...many days I slept in a box, hungry and alone.

Bosnia has nice places: Sebilj, Bascarsija, Ferhadija, but not nice people destroyed them.

Now that the world is shocked by radical Islamic extremists destroying Muslim tombs in Timbuktu, and the Taliban blowing up statues of Buddha in Bamyán in Afghanistan, we forget that the Christian West also has a history of destroying sites sacred to others, and on an even bigger scale. On Kristallnacht, 9th November 1938, Germans smashed Jewish synagogues across the country; and in the Bosnia War between 1991 and 1995, hundreds of mosques and churches were blown up.

At a lecture I gave about our work in Bochum in Germany the audience of academics became restless at what they perceived to be my tolerance of a repressive religion, and talked about Muslim women being forced to ride heavily veiled and sitting backwards on donkeys. A young student lost patience and shouted at them: ‘you have no right to criticize when we as a country were responsible for the murder of millions of Jews.’ The academics shrugged off this outburst as an irrelevance, and the look in their eyes said: ‘that was the past; why do you have to keep bringing it up? That was then. We are a civilized people and superior to everyone else.’

RESTORING HISTORY

BOSNIA MAY-JUNE 2003

Mounds of freshly picked ripe red cherries covered the market stalls of Banja Luka, along with scarlet strawberries, pale green peppers, new potatoes caked in soil, fat, crimson tomatoes, stacks of emerald spinach, and sprays of herbs propped around jars of amber honey, and baskets of speckled eggs.

This cornucopia of natural produce recalled the words of the former Yugoslav President Milosevic’s claims, that even if NATO’s attacks cut Serbia off from the rest of the world, the people would survive on what their land so lavishly provided. This used to be Illyria, that fecund province of the Roman Empire, a mythical Eden where Shakespeare set *Twelfth Night*, a fantasy land that is nonetheless a recognizable English county landscape, where people fall in love with the wrong person, and music provides balm for the emotional mayhem.

People who have never visited this part of Europe shake their heads at our naivety and utopian idealism, and make comments about the pathology of a nation of communities constantly at war with each other. History tells how invading outsiders

were the ones that caused strife. These facts also show how quickly the region absorbed invading foreign influences, from earliest times: the Greek and Roman empires followed by Roman Catholicism, then Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, and the communist empire. History records how relatively well the different faith groups lived cooperatively under these varied dominations.

The myth of Balkan pathology has been artificially imposed from the outside, to provide a convenient excuse for mightier powers to authorize occupations and invasions. The atrocities committed by all sides in the Bosnia War appear to justify the mythology. The facts show that what the rest of the world described as a civil war was in fact a manipulated conflict which had its bloody roots in a history of international interference.

Against this backdrop the civic forum in Banja Luka was launched.

People from the three ethnic groups made up the forum and cooperated without tension or problems: it was impossible to say from which particular group any member came.

The forum had acquired rights to a photographic exhibition of Banja Luka based on pictures dating from between the two World Wars. These images would remind everyone, not just from Bosnia but from beyond, of a once thriving multi-ethnic town. The forum wanted to make a choice of seventy pictures from an archive of thousands of precious negatives which the owner had managed to secrete in various European locations throughout the war, protecting them from destruction by Bosnian Serb nationalists who wanted to wipe the historical slate of Banja Luka clean. Any reminder of its multi-ethnic past had to be expunged. This exhibition would be a controversial event in this now predominantly Bosnian Serb town.

A high point of this visit was a historic encounter set up at our request by Ambassador Ian Cliff between the Reis ul Ulema and President Cavic. This led to a guarantee of funding from the Bosnian Serbs towards rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque.

Banja Luka was preparing for the visit by Pope Paul John II.

Labourers swarmed over the streets mending holes, and the town spruced itself up with rubbish clearance, and planting flowers on roundabouts, to prepare for the visit.

Most posters welcoming this ‘man of heart and peace’ remained untouched by vandals, but the one accessible to walkers in the town centre pedestrian precinct had been defaced: the Pope’s face covered by a symbol, as sinister in its connotation as a swastika: that of Ustashi Catholic fascists, who had murdered thousands of Orthodox Serbs in the Second World War. Rumours circulated of plots to assassinate the Pope, but these came from taxi-drivers overhearing remarks in the back of cabs. Although the danger might be real, neither the Vatican nor the Banja Luka authorities publicly expressed any fear. Under tight security, even the possibility of such an outrage would threaten the future of the town, and Bosnia.

Less than a century ago in Bosnia a terrorist shot and killed the imperial heir of the Austrian Empire, which colonised the region. This event sparked the First World War which in turn led to more bloody conflicts. The visit of the ailing John Paul II would be one of his last foreign journeys and could not have been to a more symbolic place in Europe. Our meeting with Petar Ragic in the Vatican a year earlier had then seemed to be a waste of time. But according to Bishop Komarica something we said changed the Pope’s mind.

Beautiful young people paraded the streets of Banja Luka. Tall, leggy, slim, long-haired women, in tight figure-hugging jeans and skimpy tops, showed off narrow

waists and flat midriffs. Their round pert bottoms, rotating like that of Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*, caught the dark glinting eyes of men striding purposefully behind, their needle-thin, hairy calves sticking out of baggy chinos. Sleeveless t-shirts stretched over perfectly honed pectorals, glistening deltoids, biceps and triceps: perfect male torsos displayed to advantage.

IMAGES OF THE PAST

Enes Zahic, an enthusiastic, good-natured man in his late sixties with white hair waving in long wisps, had devoted his life to preserving an archive of photographs dating back to the nineteenth century, and stored thousands of plates and negatives in different places across Europe, to protect at least part of the collection from war's destruction. However a large proportion of the photos kept in Banja Luka did not escape the attention of the warriors for a Greater Serbia, who destroyed them as thoroughly as they had wiped out the traces of all sixteen mosques in the town.

Enes arrived with a sample photo dating from the beginning of the twentieth century for the City Forum's exhibition planned in September. It showed a Muslim town nestled in the rolling hills and meadows around the River Vrbas. Minarets from forty five mosques pointed slender white fingers in the sky like candles on a birthday cake. Bosnian Serbs wanted to erase this kind of image.

Selection for the exhibition would be restricted to the period before the Second World War, recording a time when Catholics, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish communities lived side by side. The photographs showed how Trappist monks brought industry, a power plant, to the town, and built factories and breweries along the banks of the Vrbas where it exits the gorge and flows through flat meadows to join the River Sava on the Croatian frontier. Franciscans used to care for the poor; the

Orthodox built a cathedral in the town centre; Jewish businesses stood next to Muslim shops, and the Ferhadija Mosque towered over a packed and busy market.

These photographs bear witness to history, and describe a town with ancient mills on the river, and a squat, thatched, Serbian Orthodox wooden church, built before the invasion of Islam, and which had stood for centuries. Banja Luka, as an outpost of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, specialized in horse-trading, making saddles and harnesses. In the nineteenth century Catholic pioneers from Germany and Austria brought industry which helped make the town prosperous and self-sufficient.

By not showing photographs of the town taken after the Second World War, the exhibition would raise questions about what happened in Banja Luka in the final fifty years of the twentieth century. These questions might provoke people to think about the past and their own history. The Second World War wiped out the Jewish community almost completely. Only a few families survived. Invading Germans ordered Serbs to destroy their newly completed cathedral. Then communists destroyed many mosques, not out of ethnic hatred but because the town's Muslim population had secularized. The town experienced a building boom. This forced a mainly agricultural community into the twentieth century. New businesses demanded space.

Enes Zahic explained each picture, giving its historical and social context. He pointed out the modernising influence of the Trappists, who established breweries to wean the locals away from the more intoxicating local brandies; the charitable work of Franciscans setting up soup kitchens for the poor from all communities; the proximity of synagogue, churches and mosques; the variety of costume and tradition. The photos began to fill in the empty spaces in the town. These photos explained the dismal present lack of striking buildings and town sights, and gave the lie to the denial that anything destructive had happened in Banja Luka. Pretty postcard pictures in the collection presented a glossed portrait of an attractive provincial Hapsburg Empire

town in an idyllic setting, all-be-it with an exotic Muslim presence. There were also curled, stained snapshots: blurred images evocative of modest everyday life in a remote corner of Europe where different cultures left their mark.

Father Lacundza Balda in Rome had advised us to focus on preserving historical records like this collection: artefacts, stories and memories, dated, attributed, and filed. In places where history was being rewritten, these records would be invaluable.

ARK

Russian Ark was filmed in one bravura single take. The director Andrei Sokurov, accompanied by the ghost of a French aristocrat with sophisticated taste from the time of the French Revolution, leads us on a breathless tour of the St Petersburg Hermitage Museum. The film pauses only briefly to look at significant artefacts and paintings, to talk with caretakers, picture restorers, visitors, and art enthusiasts, in between eavesdropping on intimate scenes from history: indistinct conversations between the Empress Catherine and her confidantes; joining the daughters of Tsar Nicholas II, giggling, who whisper and play in the corridors. We witness elaborate, stuffily formal ceremonies, and realize how mind-numbingly tedious these occasions were. The exhilarating tour climaxes at a grand ball, where members of the old aristocracy, present-day citizens of St Petersburg in masquerade, dance to Valery Gergiev conducting an orchestral polonaise by Glinka, before we join a crush of people including famous figures from the past, Pushkin immediately recognizable, who slowly descend a magnificent staircase, only to discover that no one can leave. The Hermitage has become an ark floating on flood waters that lap the lower steps, and appear to be rising. The bright lights, the great art collection, the milling crowds of students, cleaners, janitors, and ordinary people from the street, and actors performing scenes from history, culminate in a party attended by splendidly dressed people. What

Pushkin describes as ‘blestiyashchiye trevogi’ ‘glittering activities’ all vanish as in a dream. We are left stranded outside. It has become menacingly dark, wet and cold. Is this the end of the world, or year zero?

The film celebrates the palace museum built by Peter the Great in St Petersburg, and stocked by Empress Catherine with a collection of the finest paintings from the Italian and Flemish Renaissance in particular. These despots’ intentions were to ‘civilize’ Russian taste, and open the country as vast as a continent to European values. A glimpse into a dilapidated attic reveals a demented vagrant trying to brew tea among broken picture frames and mouldering canvases, while snow drifts through holes in the roof and broken window panes. The scene is reminiscent of Tarkovsky’s films dealing with war. Sokurov worked as Tarkovsky’s assistant, and both depict the extremes of human suffering and the vulnerability of artistic endeavour.

The film opens with self obsessed partygoers jostling the camera on their way to the climactic grand ball. Chatter disturbs contemplation of eloquent images on display, but falls significantly silent in front of Rembrandt’s *Return of the Prodigal Son*, one of the most striking in the collection. Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* ends with a tableau that recreates Rembrandt’s image of the shaven-headed penitent wastrel burying his head in the womb-like embrace of his loving father. Figures watch in the shadows.

After the stultifying court ritual, the buoyant Glinka polonaise comes as a relief. Then everyone descends the grand staircase, under dazzling candelabras, towards the exit and all vanish like ghosts as the doors open on a grey winter’s night, where ocean waves lap the steps of the Hermitage: a Russian Ark.

Enes Zahic laid out the photographs he had chosen for the exhibition. Each picture had detailed notes and captions and were displayed in the context of three major periods of construction in Banja Luka’s history. First the Ottoman period, now

remembered by Bosnian Serbs as a time of repression, but which witnessed the flourishing of craft businesses: goldsmiths, tailors as well as saddlers. All religious faiths, including Judaism, coexisted in a mostly agricultural community. Second, the Austro-Hungarian period which witnessed industrial and commercial expansion, railways and improvement of roads; the connection between Bosnia and Austria led to the creation of a celebrated Bosnia Battalion still commemorated on a monument in Vienna. The final period of Hapsburg construction focused on the work of the architect Milosa Pajevic who designed the municipal buildings which dominate the town today, including the Banski Dvor, County Palace. 'Bans' were the equivalent of counties, and the nine Banski Dvors in this former region of Yugoslavia functioned as administrative centres, managing local affairs independently from Sarajevo. The Banja Luka Banski Dvor had space for a concert hall and gallery in the basement. In the past, people were used to having free access, but now that it had been made the heavily policed seat of the Presidency of the Republika Srpska, visitors like Enver Ceric, who had attended the Coventry Consultation, and who was then emboldened by what it achieved to visit his home town and tried in vain to reclaim his house, were intimidated, kept at bay, and could only enter the public places at the discretion of the authorities; and then only by a back door. Enver Ceric went back to London, depressed and unsure he would ever return again. were intimidated, kept at bay, and could only enter the public places at the discretion of the authorities, and then by a back door.

Two elderly men joined Enver Zahic to make a final choice of photographs for the exhibition. They could barely look at the pictures, and fingered them gingerly. The pictures were history, how they remembered their home town: a dream of the past which the images reminded them had once been real. The pictures spoke a truth from long ago. Banja Luka had now become an alien place for them.

They sat round the table, smoking one cigarette after the other, sipped coffee and talked about all kinds of other things rather than the matter in hand. They sighed, shook their heads and quibbled about how to proceed. Impatient with their prevarication Enver Zahic suggested they leave the choice to him.

At this point in the meeting an unpleasantness rose to the surface, to do with the reputation of the Soul of Europe. Avaz, a local magazine, had decided to pick a bone with a rival paper which had been giving us good publicity, and Avaz printed an article smearing us. It implied that we were thieves, saying that millions of dollars had been donated towards the building of the Ferhadija Mosque, and, since the mosque was not yet built, we must have stolen the money. In England we could have sued the magazine and spent the damages on the reconstruction; but in impoverished Bosnia such a vain action would have led us to lose rather than gain anything. We were prepared for these dirty tricks, and did not allow such allegations to put us off. The article also attacked Adnan, questioning his qualifications as a journalist. The author claimed that no one had heard of Adnan in Sarajevo. The old men took the opportunity to needle Adnan about this accusation. ‘So you believe everything you read in the papers?’ he said angrily, and left the meeting.

The photographs piled on the table. Some showed people looking at the camera with lively curiosity and pleasure. The men discarded them with barely a glance, although the people in their different costumes were among the most telling images of a multi-cultural community. The men could not bear to be reminded of the killing and removal of people they had known personally.

Their reaction warned us that the exhibition might trigger powerful emotions among the people now living in Banja Luka. The civic forum needed to prepare for controversy and even a destructive response: grief and anger, protest and denial, defensiveness, and accusation. The forum needed to provide opportunities for

discussion and debate in a safe space, to enable people to share memories and widely different reactions. This exhibition had become more than a collection of historic pictures. It raised questions about the most violent aspects of the town's recent history. It defied attempts to rewrite history and questioned the myths that had provided an excuse for ethnic cleansing. The photographs were not just a charming and intriguing evocation of times past, they silently accused, and by raising questions about what happened to this place, pointed towards the horrors, atrocities, injustices and traumas which the town needed to acknowledge. The exhibition challenged denial and reclaimed history.

The photographs not only showed what the town had once been, but also what it could become again.

Russian Ark piles on insights, commentaries, counter-commentaries, and proposes that the beauty of art is its own justification, while the camera rushes headlong down corridors, through grand, opulently-decorated rooms, and across snow-covered courtyards, as though pursuing some evasive truth, or maybe answers to questions. Why was this place built? What was its significance? What can it mean to us now?

One truth becomes evident as faces in portraits, biblical and mythological scenes and landscapes seize our attention. In the paintings themselves, and therefore reflected in the eyes of viewers like us, despite catastrophes, crimes and depredations committed by people, art expresses a human capacity for love and mutual care: a desirable and necessary alternative to destruction and the inflicting of pain.

At one moment in the film, we come across a student transfixed by a painting in which St Paul and St Peter converse. The ghost of the French aristocrat surprises the young man with a question that challenges the significance of art's role in the world: how far can we trust anyone to fulfil the highest ideals of humanity, given that history

seems to record only the worst of what we are capable of doing to each other? Perhaps the aristocrat, executed by revolutionaries, has reason to be cynical. The young man cowers, but insists that he just loves the faces of the two benign old men in the painting, and wants to be like them. His response alerts us to a vital quality of art: the ability to offer hope and possibility of a better life and a better world.

In his poem *Bread and Wine*, the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin comments on the decline of religious faith in an age of reason. He attributes to artists the role of priests to keep the prophetic and visionary fire of the imagination alight, carrying the fragile flame across deserts in dark times.

Arks in the deluge, candles flickering in the black night of humanity's soul: the curled and stained photographs of Banja Luka in the early years of the 20th century may have seemed no more than piles of scraps of paper with blurred images, but they constitute the record of lives once lived: of a place inhabited and considered home. War failed to destroy these memories and records. The exhibition would reveal the past to those who denied it, to those who preferred to forget, and, to those who remembered. All would be able to see the reality of a shared past. They could argue about the quality and precise nature of that past: the different attitudes to history. However, the images would remain the same and endure long after the arguments and the people making them had passed away.

WHAT IS A CIVIC FORUM?

Slavica Kosanevica, a Bosnian Serb, had been elected by the other members of the forum to be chair of the forum, alongside Sanela Pasic, a Bosnian Muslim, as president of the forum, unanimously because of their energy and skills. Slavica now

chaired the civic forum meeting convened to discuss its launch and began by quoting Paddy Ashdown: ‘Politics help solve problems.’

Donald interrupted her: ‘Politics is too important to be left to politicians!’

Slavica then proceeded to describe the objectives of the forum as she and the other members saw it: ‘People will help shape decisions and invite the collaboration of politicians in all spheres: jobs, ecology, returnees. Every aspect of life should concern the forum. This is what it means to be citizens, not underestimating the difficulties caused by decades of communism and war which defeated the people. It will take time to accomplish. We are at the start of a great adventure. From the forum’s point of view it is important to secure some concrete successes quickly. It is a matter of tactics and modest funding.’

Adnan described the present situation of the forum and specifically our role. He commented on the Bosnia dimension, the fact that the forum tapped into a tradition of civic behaviour that had always been part of Bosnian life. The forum would be a tool for civic targets. For the time being we benefited from the British Foreign Office’s financial support, although we were not a ‘foreign’ project. ‘The last few months we co-operated and I was with you a lot of the time,’ said this Muslim from Sarajevo, ‘everyone being actively involved. It is the best thing that has happened in Banja Luka. Thank you. You helped me in my life, and we will help you until you tell us to leave.’

‘You won’t get rid of us so easily,’ laughed Slavica. ‘Advocacy is important. We need you.’

Vehid Sehic, President of the Tuzla civic forum, attended the meeting as a consultant along with Donald Reid, Anglican Convenor of the Scottish Civic Forum, whom we had specially invited to this important first meeting of the board of the Banja Luka civic forum. Since Tuzla was in the predominantly Muslim Federation of Bosnia, we

hoped that a link with the Banja Luka civic forum would help create links across ethnic and regional boundaries, and so prevent the whole country from disintegrating into independent entities. Vehid Sehic outlined the history and objectives of his forum: a striking contract to the advanced democratic process enjoyed by the one in Scotland.

‘Our basic task was to fight for individual rights and freedoms,’ he began. ‘This was the only way towards joint collective freedom. It became a movement. People throughout the former Yugoslavia had made a huge mistake in backing totalitarianism, a view which eventually legitimized the war. So the task of our forum is different. It is basically anti-nationalist. It creates links between all normal people throughout the former Yugoslavia, in Croatia, in the Republika Srpska, in Serbia as well as the Federation in Bosnia, because we are aware of our ability to have influence. All states are connected. If something bad happens to one, all are affected. We want to show the world there are people who want positive processes. In the last year of the war, we brought together people from Ocijek and Zagreb in Tuzla and then we decided to work with politicians. Everything in Bosnia was politics. I am sorry to say, but even now this is the case. We are also fighting for an open society, for democracy and freedom. After the war we worked to create a similar situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to help establish in 1996 a citizen’s parliament in Tuzla, an alternative parliament. Sixteen NGOs, which had their own political backgrounds, came together and basically cooperated with people not just through politics, but to hear what they were saying, to make them responsible for what they were saying. Our slogan was: *They have weapons, we have truth*. Today, we work on different levels. In Tuzla we serve citizens with different projects. Typical is Voice of Citizens, which improves human rights and encourages participation in public life. We have elections to choose authorities. Civilians have rights to take part in public life. But we also keep

an eye on powerful leaders. They should not just rule, but also guide people. We cooperate with other parts of the country. We are open to everybody who supports our ideas. There is no membership but people are there to participate in activities. The focus is on linking with civil organizations in other countries, such as the Igman Initiative, which connected NGOs across borders, participating actively in making legal solutions at state level. Public dialogues on election issues are our speciality, and cross-border connections. All three countries cooperate in culture and sport, also between religious groups. But avoid the religious leaders, who are not to be trusted. Ordinary people never betrayed their faith, but the leaders did. We try to find out the concerns of ordinary people. We also look for international support, creating a European movement, uniting with Civic forums wherever they may be, and to work towards a more human globalization. In 1993 I realized we must not leapfrog over issues, phases and development. So the Tuzla civic forum is still at the beginning stage. We still do not have civil right, human rights. We learn from mistakes, such as what happened in Banja Luka in 1996 when the first Civic Forum failed. Do everything properly; it is best to be together in a nursery school stage.’

Vehid Sehic was silent about the role of the international community, which created difficult conditions for Civic forums in Bosnia, by keeping on corrupt and tainted leaders from the war years, instead of putting them on trial, sacking them, and appointing those with clean hands. Contrary to received opinion, there were enough energetic people to form a new government, supportive of democratic processes. We encountered a number of these side-lined politicians during our project to build a memorial for victims of the Omarska killing camp. The international community, fearing political vacuum, preferred to work with devils they knew; and this decision was to account for the failure of the first Banja Luka civic forum. The politicians, who had profiteered and worked alongside former warlords, did not want to be disturbed in

their nefarious activities and resisted reminders of the crimes they committed during the war. Corrupted by their pasts, they had no interest in democratic processes. They bought votes, intimidated opposition and held on to power like dictators, wasting no energy on NGOs or people like us, let alone Civic forums, for which they had nothing but contempt. Despite acknowledging the corrupt state of Bosnian politics, the international community feared, respected and enjoyed the lavish hospitality of these tainted leaders. I describe just such a man, the mayor of Prijedor, a key figure in *the white house: From Fear to a Handshake*. The story of the Banja Luka civic forum needs to be understood in the perspective of a noxious political background, locally, and internationally.

Sanela Pasic spoke, as the first president of the forum: ‘The civic forum should express all our vision, those who started it and those who will join. It is non-profit making, involving NGOs, business people, individuals, religions, all communities, cultural and sports organizations active in the city of Banja Luka. In principle we are developing and strengthening democracy in Banja Luka, so automatically improving the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have first to work locally. Our attention is to raise awareness, what it means to be a citizen, encouraging citizen initiatives, not just at election times. Democracy should happen on an every day basis; citizens must be involved in issues affecting everyday life. The civic forum will create links with government and authorities of both the Republika Srpska and the Federation, acting locally with municipal authorities. We do not want politicians making important decisions about citizens, without people participation. This is not happening now, only at elections. Our vision and our goal is the daily relationship between citizens and government.’

Sanela Pasic, a Muslim, somehow survived the war in Banja Luka. Apart from the usual problems finding work, she had to look after a mother still grieving the death of

her husband killed in action. Engaged to a man in Bihac, Sanela was considering moving to a more congenial environment, but intended to stay while there was a chance of making the forum function.

Slavica Kosanovic, a Bosnian Serb, asked Professor Zivanovic, Head of the Economics Department at Banja Luka University, to explain why the first Banja Luka City Forum had failed.

Frequently interrupted by the perky jingle of *Old Macdonald Had a Farm* on his mobile, the professor described how forums had worked successfully in the former Yugoslavia over many years. People had experience of this process, although in a totalitarian state they were not permitted the degree of democratic freedom the new forum wanted. He warned that the Banja Luka civic forum would have problems with the authorities, sooner or later, because it had no government support. He advised starting with a cultural project, building a museum perhaps: non-political, non-threatening to the government. Given the controversy surrounding Enver Zahic's photographic exhibition, even a cultural project like a museum raised issues with the government: what could be shown in it, and what should be forbidden? Professor Zivanovic had not considered this, and seemed to be urging us to be careful not to upset those in power. He suggested that the forum could monitor local elections, make lists of candidates, follow them up, and analyse the function of local government. He conceded that being an informal and independent institution the civic forum could achieve good by providing an ethical distance, presumably from government policies. The forum could focus on issues such as unemployment. This demanded courage and knowledge. He concluded: 'As to concrete results I advised the first forum that it should have an agenda for at least four years, because the issues will be around for the next fifty years. For that reason, all of us from different ages and viewpoints should support the forum. We cannot expect support from the local authorities.'

Professor Zivanovic put his finger on one of the reasons why the first forum could not succeed: it functioned in fear, and under the control of authorities who resented it. Such a forum could only be tolerated if it functioned as an NGO and limited its attention to specific issues that did not threaten those running the country. Discussion of democratic processes challenged the present system of government. Professor Zivanovic correctly predicted trouble if the forum pushed for radical changes; but this is precisely what the forum wanted to achieve.

Vehid Sehic from the Tuzla civic forum backed him up, saying: ‘War created a boom time in the media. No one invited them. We established our forum in the war. Some media supported us; some attacked us. This reaction actually helped: the negativity encouraged citizens to support our public acts. Realistically we can’t influence the media. It is more important to get support from the citizens. We have to be provocative so they can’t ignore us. Give them material which sells. Compel them to attend even when uninvited. We have to fight for our place in society and show solidarity. Help the weak ones share activities. Invite each other with media attractive activities. The media writes what it wants. No one can do anything about it. When the New Yorker publishes a list of criminals, this excites public reaction. Irresponsible citizens make an irresponsible society.’

Adnan chipped in: ‘Democracy is not just saying what you like without taking responsibility.’

‘Only have partnership with people you trust,’ Vehid continued, ‘so a movement is created. An American foundation raised funds for the civic forum. That they believed in a forum built confidence. The support of citizens is most important.’

The media turned out to be an issue in itself. A task for the forum would be to develop a media fit for a democracy.

The discussion focused on the need to develop specific projects that did not direct the forum away from its role providing a neutral space for all voices to be heard, and to encourage the democratic process.

The single businessman attending the meetings urged the forum to make sure business took responsibility for society.

‘That’s OK in the UK,’ countered Vehid. ‘Here things are different. The global market impedes local self-sustainable economies. We are in pre-primary school class. The forum and authorities are enemies. It is a matter of being brave. The World Bank gave money to an NGO for cleaning parks as part of a new initiatives project in Tuzla. We encouraged representatives from different organizations, weak minorities particularly encouraged, so money from the World Bank coming through the forum could be used for such projects. We still do not have a developed sense of helping each other.’

Business presented the forum with similar problems as the media. Support and encouragement from business might come with oppressively close links to government. It would be hard to find sympathetic voices and enlightened people in either sector. Vehid could only advise on cooperation with those NGOs in the non-profit sector that had access to generous funding from abroad, like the Nansen Dialogue Centre.

The discussion focused on projects that were achievable in the short term; lobbying to cut the book tax, which put education beyond reach of many students; ditching visas between Eastern block nations; establishing sporting links between Balkan countries; and encouraging the Igman Initiative.

The group discussed a small but symbolically significant project: cleaning and restoring the Safikada. This small memorial to the pair of star-crossed lovers, a Muslim girl and a Serb boy who, like Romeo and Juliet, committed suicide rather than

be separated, had given rise to a tradition, over generations, in which girls lit candles, and placed them on the memorial in the hope of finding luck in love. The Safikada had been situated in the shadow of the Ferhadija Mosque, but since the destruction of the mosque, it was now found tucked away in a dingy corner between some shops. Candles still flickered between the scraps of litter and broken stones.

Discussing the exhibition, the forum decided to limit the number of pictures, catalogue them, and research methods of transportation, so the exhibition could travel round Bosnia, and eventually beyond. The exhibition could become the forum's calling card. A citizen's advice bureau would be established at the same time, and a one-stop shop. This had been an aim of the forum from its inception.

The Foreign Office had stipulated that the forum be taken over as soon as possible by the people of Banja Luka. These were an intelligent, skilled, and motivated group, but the political situation constituted too great an obstacle for such a hand-over to be rushed. The Foreign Office expressed surprise and pleasure at the speed with which we established the forum but such approval of initial success became a major issue, as the rest of this story will show.

Sanela and Slavica left to organize a publicity stunt intended to publically launch the civic forum the following morning. Children from local schools would take part in cleaning the park around the castle as part of an ecology campaign. This stunt provided the Foreign Office with a media friendly project to show that their funds were supporting a 'successful and significant' venture.

THE DAY OF THE LAUNCH

CLEANING THE CASTLE GROUNDS

Schoolchildren swarmed over the castle ground, each one wearing a t-shirt with the slogan: *Together We Can Do It*. The media boycotted the event, so no pictures appeared in any of the papers. This did not bother Sanela and Slavica. Word was already spreading through families, and people were beginning to regard the civic forum as a community friendly project. In a carnival atmosphere under a bright June sun NGOs joined the children in stuffing black sacks with rubbish. Fiona McWhillam kept an eye on the proceedings for the British Embassy and, in the shade of chestnut trees, talked with Donald about nothing in particular.

Noticeable absentees included religious groups: no one from the Orthodox or Catholic Churches, or from the Islamic community. Few NGOs were represented. Such non-attendance, due to disinterest, apathy, jealousy or rivalry could not dampen the forum's spirits. These nay-sayers would come on board eventually, because democratic processes made that inevitable. At least that is what we told ourselves.

The organiser of the park-cleaning event, leader of the Ecology NGO, joined the forum for lunch at the castle restaurant. The dedicated man had his right arm in a sling. He had recently suffered an 'ecological' accident during a recent protest at a local industrial site pumping waste into the river Vrbas, which flowed below the restaurant where we were sitting.

This busy day was punctuated by a meeting at President Cavic's office which turned out to be of historic importance for the reconstruction of the mosque and relations between the two entities in Bosnia.

A HISTORIC MEETING: THE REIS AND THE PRESIDENT

The president's reception room on the second floor of the Banski Dvor was filled by a table twice the size of the vice-president's on the third floor, where we were

previously used to meeting Dragan Cavic. Twice as many leather-backed chairs surrounded it. Modern abstract paintings covered the walls.

Mustafa Cerić the Reis entered last of all, a gesture emphasising the fact that he came as a favour and not as a supplicant. President Cavic looked proud to have such an eminent visitor, wishing to show us that he had changed, and that the Republika Srpska was turning a new leaf. The president gave a warm welcome to the Reis, who permitted a cursory handshake.

Only two years before this meeting, the Reis had fled Banja Luka in fear for his life. He had been about to attend the first ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the Ferhadija Mosque, when Bosnian Serb nationalists, supporters of Dragan Cavic's party, began throwing stones at the guests, killing an elderly man. Had they seen the Reis they would have killed him too. He did not get out of his car and was immediately driven back to Sarajevo.

The British ambassador had promised to set up this meeting, with the aim of setting up further ones between the Muslim religious leader and top politicians across the whole of Bosnia, to encourage reconciliation work and garner support for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque.

Looking back over almost ten years it is now clear that what happened on this day in May 2003 was an achievement for everyone involved. At the time it seemed a stepping stone to something big and hopeful for Bosnia. In hindsight it represented a high water mark: everything seemed possible.

President Cavic sat on one side of the table flanked by Svetlana, uncharacteristically benign, and the vice-presidents Osmanovic and Tomljenovic, a token Muslim and Croat foisted on the Republika Srpska government by the Office of the High Representative, to comply with the conditions of the Dayton Accord. The vice-presidents looked like cardboard cut-outs, and spoke in polite clichés about

reconciliation, but their inexpressive features indicated they were aware of the insignificance of their contributions to proceedings and their powerlessness. There were electable non-Serbs in the Republika Srpska. The several distinguished Muslim politicians we did meet were not however appointed as Vice-presidents. It was not clear what qualified these two for the post. President Cavic behaved like the sole authority he in fact was, and when they spoke he could not disguise his impatience: the only time he did not smile. He waited for them to shut up.

Opposite President Cavic sat Reis Ceric, flanked on his right by Mufti Camdzic and two imams, and on his left by Ambassador Cliff, Donald and a translator from the British embassy office.

Reis Ceric and President Cavic had never met before. The event indicated the beginning of a process of recognition, a step towards changing relations between hard-line Bosnian Serb nationalists and the wider Islamic community in Bosnia, where every attempt had been made to ethnically cleanse the country of Muslims. After fleeing Banja Luka in 2001, to avoid death by stone-throwing protesters, Reis Ceric had issued angry statements about the psychopathic nature of Bosnian Serb nationalism. Considering how the war that the Dayton Accord halted in 1995 was considered by many never to have stopped, this meeting represented an act of faith and courage on his part.

‘The British government supports the work of the Soul of Europe,’ announced Ambassador Cliff to start the meeting on an encouraging note, ‘because we believe that dialogue between the faiths is a priority. In the UK the Royal Family, Prime Minister Blair and the Archbishop of Canterbury have all expressed interest in the worldwide significance of this issue. Rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque is a symbol of world heritage. Bosnia is a crossroads of civilization.’

Introducing us by way of announcing the launch of the civic forum he added: ‘Banja Luka will become a torch for tolerance and civilization in the region.’

At this point the president and Svetlana smiled.

After explaining the independent role of a civic forum strengthening civil society, Donald spoke about working with the religious communities, in particular Bishop Komarica, and making Presnace, where awful crimes had been committed, a centre for reconciliation.

To our surprise President Cavic had not heard of Presnace. He looked to Svetlana for information. It turned out that shortly after this meeting the soldiers responsible for the killing of the priest and nun were arrested, tried and sentenced. The bishop told us later how he visited the murderers in prison to find out and understand why they had committed their atrocious act. The arrest may have been coincidence, but it indicated a shift of attitude within the Bosnian Serb nationalist parties that criminals, who had been allowed to live openly at liberty as though they had done nothing wrong because they acted out of patriotism, were now being brought to justice and punished.

After reassuring the president with our concern for the Orthodox Church, informing him of the Bishop of Exeter’s invitation to Bishop Jefrem, together with the Orthodox choir and exhibitions of icon painting, Donald declared: ‘We are happy to be messengers on behalf of the religious leaders to the international community about issues affecting them. Each has a different agenda, but feels frustrated at the lack of response. The Islamic community generously entrusted us with the task of getting the Ferhadija Mosque rebuilt. This Sinan mosque must be a unique sign of collaboration between Christianity and Islam. It is very timely. The resonance of this project goes well beyond Banja Luka. But people are impatient: where is the mosque? The Soul of Europe is doing its best to raise funds from various sources: Arab states, Europe and

by public subscription. It is a difficult task, the most difficult we have ever encountered in our lives.

Then followed the most important part of this meeting: a dialogue between Reis Cerić and President Čović.

As soon as the Reis began to speak everyone became aware of what an extraordinary and important meeting this was. Both leaders represented opposite camps which had till a few years ago been engaged in an atrocious campaign, the one side trying to remove all trace of the other: evicting, killing and destroying, while the other side struggled tooth and nail to survive. The Reis was a leading figure in the hard-line nationalist Muslim party of Bosnia. He did not represent the emollient reconciling wing of Islam, personified by the previous mufti of Banja Luka, the one who died of a broken heart at the destruction of his beloved Ferhadija Mosque, and who had preached forgiveness and sorrow for his persecutors. They had, in his words, been suffering from ‘a concentration camp of the mind.’ The Reis had aligned himself with the more belligerent forces of Islam. He had invited the Mujahedin, with years of military training in the long Afghan War against the Soviet Union, to strengthen Bosnian Muslim beleaguered forces. This happened at a time when his community looked set to be wiped out by the superior power of Serb aggressors. These in turn were backed by Western powers, which prevented the Muslims from arming themselves. What choice did the Reis have? Saudi-style mosques began to mushroom across the Federation, after the war. This aggressively puritan style of architecture bore no relation to the centuries old aesthetically pleasing Ottoman tradition, that had been all but obliterated in the war. The new mosques warned the international community of Bosnian Muslims’ present affiliation.

This history had to be born in mind throughout the meeting. Two hardened and resilient leaders faced each other across the table, both prioritizing their different

community's interests, and only reluctantly conceding the necessity of having to find ways of co-existing. Reconciliation was not yet on the agenda: just recognition of a de-facto situation that war should cease, and that future peace must be an absolute requisite. Anything was preferable to a perpetual repetition of atrocity and counter-atrocity over subsequent generations.

The president gazed with intense enthusiasm at the man opposite him, and the Reis slowly warmed his chilly demeanour, cracking jokes and lightening the atmosphere. There was never any doubt that his visit represented a favour, that he considered himself to be the superior person at the table. However, what was striking from the moment the Reis started to speak was the personal quality of the discussion, in which politics took a back seat to human beings talking about life, feelings and hopes.

'This is an interesting meeting for me,' he began softly, his tone both ironic and mournful. 'I was wondering how it would look. Would it be ordinary, uneventful?'

He then surprised everyone with a piece of personal history: 'I was thrilled when I first came to Banja Luka. In 1968 I came here to study theology at the Ferhadija Mosque. I left well qualified. In fact I accepted the post of imam at Banja Luka for the following year. You know why I was so happy? That Ramadan I fell in love!' Smiles all round the table, which broadened when he added wistfully: 'But I did not marry that one! Her name was Benaiza. What happened? In 1968 my grandfather died. He was also called Mustafa, and I could not attend the funeral.' He sighed, not giving any explanation, then for a moment allowed his mind to wander, conjuring up memories of the past, the beauty of his memories of old Banja Luka: 'Ah, the River Vrbas! Bosnians can't swim well, it is a well known fact... mmm... memories... songs... Banja Luka is well represented in songs. They are more powerful than other songs in Bosnia.'

He pulled himself together. ‘Two or three months after the war when Steiner was deputy of the Office of the High Representative, and the former mufti was still alive, you all know how angry and disappointed he was that the Ferhadija Mosque had gone. He wanted to be buried by the mosque and it was not allowed. Recently the Orthodox Church transferred the remains of the former Bishop, Vladika Nikolai, from Nis to Sarajevo. I received an invitation to attend and wished I could. I apologised and wrote a letter and asked for support for the former Banja Luka mufti to be also buried where he had wished. I am sorry I missed this opportunity. I received a tape of a French film about the work of Patriarch Bartolomeo in Istanbul. I met him at a conference in Split, where we were both speaking. We were supposed to travel to Venice via the islands of the Adriatic but didn’t have the time.’ The Reis then cracked a joke about conspiracy theories, but his musings about these recent events were stirring memories also from the distant past: the Battle of Lepanto in the fifteenth century when Venice defeated the Moors. This decisive sea victory for a while marked the end of the Muslim Turkish threat to Europe. This in turn brought to mind Shakespeare’s play and Verdi’s opera about Othello, a Moor from North Africa, who led Venice in several victorious encounters with the Turks. Othello’s first appearance in the opera is unforgettable, trumpeting the defeat of ‘Muslim arrogance’; yet he was a Muslim. This paradox illustrates the troubled psyche of Othello, the great warrior, whose tragic flaw consists of jealousy regarding his white Christian wife, and insecurity about his background and allegiances. Such dilemmas reflect the diverse influences in Europe today. The Reis’s words about Christian meetings with Muslims in such Catholic strongholds as Split and Venice stirred up memories of past rivalries and enmities that shaped the history and culture of Europe, yet which found such rare coexistence in Bosnia throughout that time.

‘The Ferhadija!’ exclaimed the Reis, arriving at the main point and purpose of the meeting. ‘It is like the *Thousand and One Nights*, the story of the Sultan and Scheherazade. How to deal with the woman?’

Was he meaning the introduction to the Arabian classic which tells of the early return of the Sultan from his hunt to discover his wife in the arms of a eunuch, at which point the Sultan kills his wife? Or did the Reis mean the part where the Sultan takes a new wife every day, having her executed the next morning, until Scheherazade puts an end to this cycle of violence, by telling her husband stories every night, postponing the climax for the following day so he cannot bring himself to kill her? She puts off the blow of the sword for a thousand and one nights, by which time the Sultan is cured of his misogyny.

‘You made a promise, but we each have to do what we have to do,’ continued the Reis, referring to Scheherazade’s desperate measure; then added with a laugh: ‘Now I could tell you stories! We would need a billion and one nights to tell our stories in order to put off the inevitable. Let me tell about Foca.’ He was referring to a town of bloody persecution of Muslims during the war in Eastern Bosnia. ‘We speak different languages but understand each other very well. At Easter time there is a tradition of exchanging eggs. What happened? I received a gift from the Metropolitan of eggs decorated in Cyrillic script!’ Everyone laughed. At least this year witnessed a return to old traditions from before the war, when the religious communities honoured each other’s festivals. The Office of the High Representative in Banja Luka had persuaded Mufti Camdzic to pass on Easter greetings in person to Bishop Jefrem, who acknowledged the gesture by announcing that protocol had been observed. Would Bishop Jefrem reciprocate by passing Bajram greetings to Mufti Camdzic later in the year? This might seem amusing to people in the rest of Europe, unconcerned about these relatively minor niceties, but in a country where the communities and religions

had recently been catastrophically torn apart, such gestures assume greater significance.

The Reis then made another surprising revelation, speaking directly to the president: ‘You and I come from the same part of Bosnia you know, Visoko.’ Visoko is an attractive old town a few miles to the north of Sarajevo. The Reis spoke about the graveyard in Visoko where the names of Cavic and Ceric could be seen plentifully on the gravestones. He was making the point of ancestry shared by all Bosnians, before coming to the wider issue of destructive myths which had festered ever since the birth of nationalism in the nineteenth century and were perpetuated in books like *The Mountain Wreath* and *The Bridge over the Drina*, which describe Turkish cruelty and Serb suffering in grisly detail.

‘At a conference of Balkan leaders in Davos,’ continued the Reis, ‘Slovenia, which is flooding our market with produce so we cannot sell our own goods, still expresses anger about the Ottoman Empire and the business of child kidnapping.’

‘This is only the fifth story of the billion and one!’ President Cavic interjected good-naturedly, trying to let sleeping dogs lie.

‘This anger keeps Turkish guilt alive,’ responded Reis Ceric. ‘Westerners do the same with their economic and political control over the whole world. We used to have the Grand Vizier in Istanbul. Today we have Bill Gates in America. I recently visited Los Angeles... but that is the seventh story!’

By naming all the places he had visited: Davos, Split, Los Angeles, and hinting at many others, the Reis made the point that, of the two leaders at this meeting, he was the best travelled.

‘We are still the best nation in the world,’ the Reis announced proudly. ‘Despite our hatred and the way we attack each other, we do know how to live together. The mosque issue is a moral, not a political issue. I thank Donald Reeves and the British

government who supports the project. But there is also a need for support from Banja Luka. We have to do this together, even when we both believe in the rightness of our different positions. Freedom and human rights, though they were denied Muslims here, are an issue which will no longer be an issue. The Emirates have offered to help. But we should do it ourselves. However we cannot. We need help. Serbia is opening good relations with Arab countries now. All religions try what they can.'

Then he raised the painful subject of the violence at the ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque: 'I never thought I would ever find myself in a position to ask for help. The 7th May 2001 was a bad moment for a whole generation. Let us build the mosque. Banja Luka will be a happier and better place.'

Everyone looked sad at this point, remembering the day of shame. European Commissioner Chris Patton had declared that such medieval behaviour must not be tolerated in a modern world and that the Republika Srpska could not expect to enjoy future aid or support from the European Union. Banja Luka retained its pariah status as the worst town in Europe.

The Reis ended his speech abruptly, feeling he had said enough and not wanting to appear as a supplicant at the table of a man whose party had destroyed the mosque in the first place, but not before lightening the atmosphere by saying with a laugh: 'Let us continue the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights!*'

'Thank you for your kind words,' responded the president, adding with a smile: 'We know the *Thousand and One Nights!* Recently I spoke with the Defence Ministry. The war came to an end eight years ago. But we have to end the war in our heads. This is not a problem for ordinary people on the street, but when the war is in the heads of those who make important decisions then it is a problem. As to the 7th May 2001 I

never imagined this could happen. I was shocked. Extreme emotions are rarely expressed, but when they are, it is an eruption.’

Given the circumstances of the meeting this was the least he could have said about the violent demonstration, even though at the time he was among many who put the blame on the Islamic community for being ‘provocative’. The victim had been the one at fault: a familiar accusation from the offender trying to excuse a crime. Now the president, without making any admission, vaguely hinted at taking blame for his side.

President Cavic wanted to reassure all of us that the Republika Srpska had changed its attitudes and was making practical demonstrations of opening doors to all communities. ‘The visit of Pope John Paul II is important for all of us. It can have positive and negative consequences. We are aware of them and now take responsibility for the visit. Publicly I do everything to say how normal such an event should be. My family come from Travnik.’ He was making the point that his roots as a Bosnian Serb came from the ancient capital of Bosnia, seat of kings before the Islamic conquest, and which then became the main seat of power in the early years of the Ottoman Empire, before Sarajevo became the capital. ‘We moved to Tuzla and experienced trauma and tragedy shared by all in this country. We are all mixed. My mother’s sister married a Croat and the sons became Croat soldiers. We were Serb soldiers and at war with our own family. My uncle’s daughter married a Muslim living on the Croat side, so that also became a tragedy. Serbs in Bukovina, like the Muslims in Banja Luka, were persecuted. People in all entities of Bosnia must face these difficult issues. This is just a start. I am trying to say that all facts must be acknowledged. We have to be aware of consequences and be politically wise, for both the short and long term. Now, eight years after the war, there is no one around who will prevent the building of mosques in Banja Luka. Today is a reality which was inconceivable only five years ago. In Kotor Varos and Gradishka mosques are being

rebuilt without trouble. Religions must not be political. This is my belief: freedom for all, despite past and present misunderstandings. In just three years we can assess the truth, three of us from three different ethnic groups all keep good relations as an example to others.’ He gestured to the vice-presidents sitting on either side and continued: ‘We fulfil our duties without conflict. Our big aim is to calm the big emotions in people. Everything we do is in our heads. Take Cyprus, which has suffered division for the last thirty years; but ours was bloodier. Though many people think change is too slow, I am aware of the feelings around the destruction of churches, not just mosques, but also the Orthodox cathedral, which was destroyed only two years after it had been built. War is in our heads. I cannot help financially, but whatever happens, you can be assured of my support and help specifically with the public presentation of the project.’

No one questioned the description of the massacres of Muslims in the Prijedor region and at Srebrenica as ‘misunderstandings’, nor the implication that the Orthodox cathedral had been destroyed by Muslims, when in fact German Nazis had been responsible for that vandalism during the Second World War, the one Serbs usually meant when referring to ‘the war’. The president held to the line, shared by most of the international community also that guilt for the atrocities during the Bosnia War was shared equally by all communities. This exempted him from any responsibility for the destruction of the Ferhadija Mosque.

The Reis swallowed his indignation and, quietly aware of being the more educated, experienced and distinguished politician of the two, responded diplomatically not wishing to spoil the meeting with quibbles and further recriminations: ‘Honesty and dishonesty are habits. We are political; we are who we are. So an honest attitude would be concrete: where do we start? The Soul of Europe’s help is significant. I want to praise you, the president, for two things: first for your May 3rd statement to the

Republika Srpska Assembly. We Bosniaks could not survive another 7th May.

Secondly your encouragement to the people at the refugee site of Kororsko near Doboј. It was a small gesture, but will encourage refugees to return to their own homes. You give us human rights and we will take care of the mosque.’

The vice-presidents now spoke in turn, repeating what President Cavic and Reis Ceric had said. The president looked bored, yawned and drummed the table impatiently with his fingers.

Donald moved into the discussion, raising the issue of responsibility for the rebuilding of the mosque. ‘When religion and politics are hard to separate it makes for bad religion. Building the mosque as it used to be raises technical questions. We need expert opinion, which means the project will take time, but nothing but the best will do. I have an innocent question to the president and Vice-presidents.’ He paused and coughed in warning. ‘Will you support the work of the Soul of Europe in all its diversity, and also in the reconstruction of the mosque? We are raising funds for the mosque. It is a privilege to do so, but would the Republika Srpska contribute something, even if only in a symbolic way. Whenever I talk to ambassadors about the project they always ask what you the Republika Srpska is contributing.’

‘That is not such an innocent question,’ laughed the president. ‘There will be no obstruction to the project.’

Then he surprised the vice-presidents, the British ambassador, the Reis and the muftis by contradicting what he had said only a few moments before and declaring, in a manner that registered his statement as official: ‘If we can give one and a half million Euros towards the Pope’s visit, because that is what the security is costing us, then we can give something on a similar scale to this project.’

This was more than we had expected to hear from him.

The Reis took this information on board without comment. Being an astute politician he waited for proof that this declaration meant more than words, and asked two questions, one short term, the other long term: ‘At a meeting of the multi-religious board in Foca it was suggested a multi-religious forum should be set up in Banja Luka to encourage dialogue. We have to change the manner we communicate. Ordinary people can accept it easier if they see politicians are not afraid to come out publicly.’ He then referred to an extreme-Muslim fundamentalist killing a Serbian Orthodox man in response to the war in Afghanistan trying to overthrow the Taliban: ‘Since the murder in Konic there have been regular inter-religious meetings there. As to the long term: next time there should be only one President and one Prime Minister here! You are too expensive! Is there anyone in the Republika Srpska who hasn’t been a minister yet?’

‘We have only one government in the Republika Srpska,’ countered the president swiftly. ‘But how many seats of government are in the Federation?’ He was referring to the tradition of the various regions in Bosnia being autonomous in matters of education, policing and running the economy. He either forgot that his own entity was a region of Bosnia, or wished to rewrite history by implying that the Republika Srpska had always been an independent separate country, distinct from the Federation and not part of the whole country.

‘Cut the administration costs,’ said the Reis laughing, and insisting on having the last word. ‘Then there will be enough for the Ferhadija.’

The president and the Reis then exchanged warm handshakes and smiled, in marked contrast to the formal chilly mood earlier. Svetlana seemed delighted. It struck everyone that a significant meeting had just taken place.

‘That was just a photo opportunity,’ quipped Dr Ceric dismissively, disabusing us immediately of any such notion. Now, without his formal head gear and robes, he bustled breathlessly around Mufti Camdzic’s office in the Islamic Centre. The dilapidated quarters of the only building standing on the site of the Ferhadija Mosque and where the Islamic community camped out, were a contrast to the elegant and well upholstered apartments of Bishop Jefrem, even Bishop Komarica, and the imposing presidential reception rooms.

One of the Reis’s minders drove us there. The intimidating, fierce, and extravagantly muscled driver looked on his guard, aware of being on enemy territory. The smart black Audi looked out of place in the rubble strewn parking space by the Islamic Centre, and the contrast between the car, protected by several burly bodyguards, and the ruined site spoke volumes about the separation of Banja Luka from the Federation, and the sharp decline of Muslim fortunes in this part of Bosnia.

We were used to meeting Dr Ceric in the formal surroundings of his reception room in Sarajevo where he appeared in either robes or suit and always wore his Grand Mufti fez, occasionally at a slight tilt, as though put on in haste, or perhaps to make himself look rakish. Now he sat with us informally, and although the meeting had not been scheduled, hastily fitted in before he returned to Sarajevo, it turned out to be one of the most significant meetings in our time in Bosnia, a turning point in our relations with the Islamic community, and a big step forward in the rebuilding of the mosque.

The quip about a photo opportunity reminded us again that the Reis had done us a favour, all be it willingly. Dr Ceric’s sense of relief implied he was laying a ghost to rest. He had come face to face with one of his arch-enemies, and the encounter resulted in a slight but sure warming of relations. Flushed, he bustled about the Islamic Centre with Mufti Camdzic and ordered people about in the background.

Everyone smiled approvingly simultaneously proud and concerned, anxious and fussing, all expressing relief that the visit had gone smoothly.

In the following minutes, Dr Ceric assured us that financial support for the Ferhadija Mosque was guaranteed from the United Emirates and other Arab sources. Building would begin already the next year. Abu Dhabi and Malaysia could be further sources of funding. However Dr Ceric had two requests to make of us.

First we needed to return to Turkey, see the relevant ministers in Ankara, and secure expertise for the reconstruction of a Sinan mosque. Because of soured relations between Bosnia and Turkey, Dr Ceric needed our help. On our first visit to Istanbul we discovered the ambivalent feelings of Turkey toward its former colony, and its apathy towards a section of the world Islamic community under threat of genocide. Historical reasons for this ambivalence included Turkish unacknowledged guilt for its own successful genocide against the Armenians, a century earlier, and its continuing oppression of political groups like the Kurds. Turkey had become a fiercely secular country, suspicious of all religious groups. During the war, desperate unarmed Bosnian Muslims turned for support to Saudi Mujahedin. Turkey refused to cooperate. However, these Muslim fighters trained in Afghanistan's war to oust the Soviets, were not a modern phenomenon. They comprised a fanatically religious sect of Islam which had its roots hundreds of years ago in the Crusades, specifically the final Fourth Crusade when the Mamelukes, an army of ruthlessly efficient and ferocious warriors, successfully resisted the Christian invasion of the Middle East, and annihilated the Christian presence on their lands with a brutality that matched the notorious slaughter of Muslims during previous Crusades. What made this sect invincible was a combination of aggressive military skills and religious zeal. Throughout the subsequent history of Islam to present day Al Qaeda and Isil, the Mamelukes were an inspiration to those Muslims who suffered political, economic and social repression.

Dr Cerić and the former Turkish ambassador to Sarajevo now traded insults and were no longer on speaking terms. Being a heritage project, the Ferhadija Mosque needed to be built in traditional Ottoman style. Turkey possessed the expertise and must be wooed again. Having done us a favour by coming to Banja Luka, he wanted us to return the favour and help build bridges between the two countries.

The second request involved Europe. We needed to attract Western support in rebuilding the mosque, not just sympathetic words, but money.

‘One euro is worth more than a million Saudi dollars,’ declared the Reis pithily.

Christians had destroyed the mosque, a European heritage site, so to show seriousness of intent, Europe must provide the initial funding: a gesture of immense significance to the Ferhadija, a project of unique Christian Muslim collaboration.

‘We have a mission,’ Dr Cerić announced. ‘We do not need Mujahedin. But the European Union continues to connect us with terrorism.’

Practical projects like the Ferhadija were now urgently needed, and for this reason Dr Cerić had decided to throw his weight behind it, promising financial support from Arab countries so the building could start within a year. He still needed us to make the crucial first steps.

Having told us this in breathless haste, he left quickly for Sarajevo, but not before he had let us be whisked back to the Bosna Hotel in his Audi by the swarthy muscled driver bodyguard, who kept a watchful eye on the road and people.

THE SWIRLING WATERS OF THE VRBAS

The launch party for the civic forum in the large dining room of the Bosna Hotel had run out of steam by the time we returned from meeting the Reis at the Islamic Centre. Like at a wedding where guests had not bothered to turn up, members of the forum

with a scattering of family and friends clung disappointed and dispirited to the outer walls while several hip-swaying girls in black, low-cut dresses, waved their arms, and sang turbo pop at the other end of the hall. Numerous NGOs had been invited and were conspicuous by their absence, including the Nansen Centre which we had considered an ally, but who informed us solemnly beforehand, that they saw no future for a civic forum in Banja Luka. They kept reminding us of the earlier failed one. The women from another NGO, Vidra, also excused themselves: they had been invited to travel across Europe addressing other women's groups. None of the religious communities were represented.

Even the presence of a cheerfully smiling President Cavic, who had made an effort to be present, could not lift our spirits.

Ambassador Cliff opened the evening by welcoming the few guests, only a few of them local, and baffled everyone with a speech about rail timetables and his support for local breweries. He was trying to make a point about the diversity of interests the forum could encourage. The ambassador spoke in Bosnian, a skill not sufficiently appreciated by the assembled people, who being mostly internationals, did not understand a word, and wished he had spoken in English.

Adnan and the forum members had done their best to create a celebratory mood but the Bosna Hotel dining hall resolutely refused to contribute a festive atmosphere. Every morning in this dingy low-ceilinged functional space, guests helped themselves to pappy imported rolls, sickly chicory coffee, cheap orangeade, and flabby, cold, pre-cooked omelettes left over from breakfast.

A number of forum members boycotted the event because of President Cavic's presence: he still represented Bosnian politics at its most corrupt and nationalistic. Former Ambassador Graham Hand described him as a pragmatist. The president may have genuinely meant everything he said about justice and reconciliation, but had still

to meet the demands of his nationalist constituency, which remained faithful to the dream of a Greater Serbia, ethnically cleansed of Islam. I once witnessed a private moment of stress, which it would have been satisfying to think, had been caused by this tension between meeting opposing demands from Europe and the wishes of his party's bedrock. This happened during the consultation at Coventry when Dragan Cavic, then Vice-President, left the group and went outside. Unaware of my presence, and thinking he was alone, he hugged a stone wall. I watched his face contort with sorrow and pain. He then walked disconsolately to a pub, where he spent the rest of the evening drinking heavily.

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The forum members met next morning at Adnan's office to discuss the future.

The discussion ranged over possible projects around employment and returnees, reconstructing museums; libraries, cultural activities and events; organizing public enquiries with panels; electing a chairperson, experts, witnesses and officials, nothing hidden, which was something new to this region of Europe; and regular public meetings open to anyone to come and talk about any issue in safe public spaces, where people could discuss contentious issues without fear of arrest or persecution.

Professor Zivanovic mentioned that in September the City Council presented an annual budget which could provide the forum with an opportunity to connect with the administration and the public on issues of fundable projects: issues of concern to all citizens who would then be encouraged to take part in informal consultations.

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After this discussion we gathered in one of the numerous cafés that lined the streets of Banja Luka and noticed the road being tidied up for the Pope's visit. Rubbish no longer lay in heaps on street corners. Garish salvias and geraniums were planted on roundabouts.

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No one knew it then, but this forum meeting turned out to be the last in this office. Adnan was shortly to face intimidation from the landlord trying to extort an extra month's rent. Radmila, who longer worked for us because of lack of funds to pay her, had used the phone in Adnan's absence, and run up a bill of four hundred Euros while chatting to friends in America. It turned out she was in cahoots with the landlord and two gangster brothers. The landlord, the two brothers, and four menacing Bosnian Serbs suddenly cornered Adnan and demanded money. Radmila had told them about us. Perhaps she wanted to take revenge for being given notice or had always been involved in this kind of racket. The latter proved to be the case when, on a visit two years later, we accidentally bumped into her at one of the riverside restaurants. She was sitting next to the bar between the gangster brothers who were inspecting the diners. After momentary embarrassment she gave a slight nod of recognition. The men stared at us steadily.

Adnan took the unpleasant experience with characteristic sang-froid, although we all knew how dangerous it was for him as a Muslim from Sarajevo to work in Banja Luka.

Losing the office turned out a blessing for the forum members. It could only be reached by a steep flight of stairs making it inaccessible to disabled users, a legal condition all NGOs had to take into account. Future meetings were held in the office space the mayor had given us a year earlier: more cramped but free of charge.

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In the evening we met Dejan Jovanovic, the forum's first manager who had secured a better job in a bigger organization. He took us to a café by the Vrbas on the edge of town. The river waters swirled under wooden platforms where we sat. The trees

rustled on the opposite bank where lovers strolled arms around each other under a star studded sky. Candles flickered on the tables.

Adnan had brought a young friend, also called Adnan from Sarajevo to look after us and translate while the older Adnan was organising the launch. Young Adnan, oozing friendliness and concern for our well being, constantly stroked our arms, and looked into our eyes with a smile asking: 'Everything OK?'

While young people sat round the candles, surrounded by darkness and the rushing sounds of water, the Adnans told us how, in the days after the war ended, they and another friend, also called Adnan, drove from Sarajevo to Banja Luka. Young Adnan had just celebrated his fifteenth birthday. The drive was an act of defiance, not only to the newly created Republika Srpska, but also to the international community, which was already treating the entity as a new country based on predominantly Serb ethnicity. Banja Luka provided a example of successful ethnic cleansing. After Shoah, Jews from other parts of Europe had no reason to visit Auschwitz, a town in Poland not their home. On the other hand Banja Luka had long been the second city of Bosnia, after Sarajevo, and a source of pride to all Bosnians for its history, traditions, mosques, university, and beauty of location. The journey by the three teenage Adnans meant more than a V sign to those who had instigated the war, and who had ended it with politically ratified ethnic divisions. The drive was an act of re-possession saying: 'This is our country too. This is our town and you cannot stop us coming here!'

Young Adnan suddenly recognized a Serb friend sitting with two young women at a neighbouring table and rushed over to embrace him. We had met the student Nicola briefly in Sarajevo at a youth centre established by the Red Cross, and he enthusiastically joined us.

We sat with these young people, two Serbs, Dejan and Nicola, and two Muslims, young and old Adnan, with the Vrbas swirling beneath us. The war suddenly seemed

inconceivable, a monstrous aberration, a nightmare created by a group of psychotic fanatics. The waters splashed beneath our feet. The swift currents carried twigs and detritus in eddies downstream. While the moist air cooled us from the heat of the day, it was easy to imagine Banja Luka as it had once been, and what it could be again.

THE POPE COMES TO TOWN

Banja Luka was deserted. Outside the Palas Hotel, tables normally packed with coffee and beer drinkers, were bare. Scarcely anyone walked the sidewalks. The traffic died, and waiters laughed scornfully about the Pope's visit. It seemed as though the people of Banja Luka had decided to leave town rather than be around for him.

Taken with special guests by bus from Bishop Komarica's residence, and turning the corner just outside Banja Luka, we were astonished to see a large field with unexpected hosts of waving yellow flags and thousands of people in white caps, gathered under a sun blazing blisteringly in a cloudless cerulean sky. Where did they come from? Rows of buses indicated they had travelled from all over the Catholic regions of Bosnia and Croatia.

Cheerful hymns sounded over loudspeakers, and the flags waved incessantly, while children cheered and shouted, although the Pope was still en route from Rome, and not expected for several hours yet at the airport several miles away. The crowds had been there since dawn.

Surveying the scene reminded me of our visit to the Vatican, where a few words spoken with an official had changed the Pope's mind. The Pope had not intended to visit Bosnia. He would have preferred Croatia, where the Catholic majority would always assure him a warm welcome. At this meeting we had sensed the futility of persuading a massive, unapproachable and secretive institution, protective of its interests and reputation, to even consider helping the wretched diocese of Banja Luka.

The official who spoke with us had not hidden his ambition to become a Vatican ambassador. Looking embarrassed, he had politely thanked us for our concern saying: 'How good it is to hear that you, an Anglican priest is caring for Bishop Komarica.' Donald responded robustly by challenging the Vatican to also take responsibility. His words must have stung the official into making a report about our meeting to the Pope, who had then accepted his duty to make a special visit to Banja Luka. Bishop Komarica had told us: 'Something you said changed the Pope's mind.'

Crowds of thousands who unite in adoration and excitement can be intimidating. There is a passage in Nizami's *Story of Beautiful Mahan* in which Mahan is taken by a devil on a wild horse-ride into the mountains. Terrified and exhausted, Mahan looks down on a vast plain that seems to be peaceful and deserted. He suddenly becomes aware that the terrain of this wilderness is made up of thousands of figures, heaving as a single organism. He sees in horror that they are monsters swaying, waving and shrieking in unison. The sound grows ever louder, and the writhing creatures become more threatening. He discovers that the horse he is riding has turned into a monster. Mahan is thrown off, and the monster prepares to mutilate and devour him.

At Nazi rallies and football stadiums, joyful expressions of allegiance can turn in an instant to violent hatred for those who do not share the celebrations : the opposing side, or those absent and excluded from the celebration of 'us'. In the case of political rallies, a 'führer' whips the masses to pitches of enthusiasm. Reason and good judgement give way to atavistic urges that lead to world wars. The tranquillity of what seems a harmless landscape erupts into a steadily increasing and unstoppable surge of mindless violence.

After several hours the shouts of the people at the Catholic rally in Banja Luka began to increase. Pope John Paul II arrived and was carried in his throne onto the platform. He gazed out at the adoring and hysterically cheering crowds, and for

several moments looked moved, a response to ecstatic welcome familiar from all his global visits. However I preferred to imagine that for a few seconds the Pope was expressing a deep sorrow for what had happened in the past, and a desire to make good. He waved his hand weakly and looked with a melancholy smile over the tens of thousands of heads and frantically waving flags. He then leaned his head on his hand. He may have been overwhelmed by a crushing weight of grief and guilt for the Church, but it may have been a side effect of his recent stroke.

The moment passed quickly, but for those seconds the thick veil of protocol lifted as by a sudden gust of wind, and the Pope appeared human. Familiar words of peace and reconciliation then followed. Prayers and blessings engulfed the rest of the proceedings that seemed to drag on for ever.

Weight of the past crushes the present and poisons the future. Edward Gibbon's view of history described in the introduction to his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as 'little more than a register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind', implies infinite degrees of guilt, recrimination, vengeance, suffering, and repetition of the same, reaching back to the beginnings of history and endlessly forward into the future. Most would agree that we must learn from history, not to make the same mistakes; but we have now reached an epoch where the horrors and complexities of our past are so painful to take on board that they destabilise our efforts to change. History becomes a store of myths and excuses for our present actions, allowing politics to be reactive rather than reflective. 9.11 gave the United States a reason to wage war on its perceived enemies. The root causes of terrorism have become irrelevant to the immediate need to combat and eliminate it. The reality of the Holocaust remains fresh in the memories of a generation who survived it: that colossal atrocity became the mythic excuse for Israel's claim to preserve its right to exist,

whatever the cost to others. Its soldiers kill Palestinian children, the argument being that, to ensure the security of the country's future, it is reasonable to eliminate those who may one day threaten it. When challenged on the patent injustice and criminality of such actions they say: 'We must never allow ourselves to be burnt in the flames again.' So the cycle of violence continues.

Balkan history is understood by many to be a cyclical process of three different communities struggling for dominance, punishing the others for acts of aggression committed generations before, and threatening to continue for generations to come. It is said that the cycle repeats itself every fifty years, giving time for the intervening generation to prepare and arm itself for the next conflict. Like many historical myths, this is a simplification: a reduction to a war of attrition between good and evil, each side seeing the other as bad, and themselves as being justified. The leader of the most powerful nation in the world spoke this language. When questioned about the human rights of terrorist prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, George Bush declared with the conviction that permits no argument: 'One thing I know: they are bad men.'

The background to Pope John Paul's visit to Banja Luka was steeped in myths, terrible memories, and facts of brutality. This explained why so many Bosnian Serbs boycotted the event. Sixty years earlier a notorious atrocity took place near the spot where tens of thousands of Catholics were now welcoming their beloved 'Papa'. In the Second World War a psychotic Catholic priest allied himself with the fascist wing of the Croatian army, which supported the Nazis. He rampaged through Banja Luka, leading, and encouraging, a massacre of Orthodox men, women and children. He then went on to run a concentration camp, where thousands of Serbs were murdered. The Catholic Church, though reticent in condemnation of the Nazis and their atrocities, did excommunicate the murderous priest, who was then executed for his crimes. Memory became myth. The Orthodox version of what the priest did implied that he acted on

behalf of the Catholic Church; that he went unpunished, and the Catholic Church still harboured deadly hostility to Serbs. This myth entitled Orthodox Serbs to destroy Catholic churches, including as a matter of priority the church where the psychotic priest began his murderous spree; then to kill Catholics, commit atrocities against them and put them in concentration camps, all of which happened in the Bosnia War.

Such history is mythic and selective of facts. When journalists arrived to cover the Pope's visit and sought out dissident voices among the Orthodox Serbs in Banja Luka, the atrocities committed by the psychotic Catholic priest were repeated without reference to those committed more recently against Catholic priests and nuns: the implication being that the more recent murders were justified by the past.

Bishop Komarica, in the middle of one of our conversations, uncharacteristically lost his temper on this issue, hoarsely shouting in despair: 'Must we forever have to pay for past crimes!'

Pope John Paul II knew this history. His visit could not pass without an apology.

Political apologies are carefully choreographed affairs. Machiavelli, author of the template on how to be a successful politician and hold on to power, would regard the need for an apology as weakness. Actions must be robustly defended, even when the rest of the world knows them to be wrong. Religious leaders never apologize, because crimes are committed to defend the faith. However, until an apology is made, there can be no hope of ending the cycle of retribution. When politicians find it expedient to apologize they do so in a way that exonerates them from guilt, saying: 'We must learn lessons.' But apology begs the need for restitution. After the Second World War, the Papacy at last apologised for centuries of anti-Semitism, and declared that the Jews as a people could no longer be blamed for the death of Christ. An injustice had been acknowledged, but the issue remained: how could the Church possibly make up for

over one and half millennia of violent persecution? Fear of the extent of restitution is a reason for absence of apology.

On his visit to Banja Luka, Pope John Paul II gave a speech which included an apology. It emerged without fanfare, in the course of a plea for reconciliation asking forgiveness for the actions of those Catholics who had 'behaved badly in the past'.

When apologies are made in the Balkans, care is usually taken to include all the communities in the share of guilt. This renders the apology pointless. However appalling the crime, the perpetrating side can always find a matching atrocity committed by the others to set against it so no one needs to be especially sorry for any particular crime. When new mass graves are discovered uncovering massacres of hundreds of people, including women and children, Bosnian Serbs do not apologize, but shrug shoulders and remind the world of atrocities committed against them throughout their history.

Who says sorry first? Does it make any difference?

When the Pope singled out the Catholics and did not mention Orthodox or Muslim crimes, in one sentence in the middle of his long speech he made the difficult first step. There should also have been a scheduled visit to the site of the new Orthodox cathedral, and to the empty ground where the Ferhadija Mosque once stood, both in the company of Bishop Jefrem and Mufti Camdzic. A symbolic opportunity had been wasted.

The world media did report the apology, but most of the Catholics at the gathering in Banja Luka would not have noticed it. The Holy Father had come to visit them and nothing else mattered. The Pope blessed his flock in a diocese where they had been decimated, giving them courage. The problematic act of reconciliation and forgiveness still lay far in the future.

Fear and threat of assassination meant that the Republika Srpska police force lined all the routes along which the Pope travelled, with solitary armed officers standing a hundred yards apart.

DRY BONES AND MARCHING SAINTS

Ninety year old Otto von Hapsburg was the chief guest at a concert and reception organized by the Catholic Church in the Banski Dvor, the evening before the Pope's visit.

'Be there!' commanded Sister Mirna with her sweetest smile as she handed us invitations before gliding swiftly to the next task. Despite stress and pressure of work she looked calm and unflustered.

On the assassination of his uncle Grand Duke Ferdinand in 1914, Otto von Hapsburg became heir to the throne of the Austro Hungarian Empire. A photograph taken shortly before the outbreak of the First World War shows Otto as a cheerful boy snuggling against his great grandfather's lap. Kaiser Franz Josef, the old emperor with a handle-bar moustache, smiles down indulgently.

Ninety years later the boy had become a trim old man in good health. His piercingly black eyes watched the other guests, while he only spoke with the bishop.

Reverberations of history suddenly agitated Banja Luka. A pope was about to make a first visit here, and, unexpectedly, I came face to face with the only person still living who could not have been closer to the events which triggered the world wars of the previous centuries. The presence of such a significant figure might have demanded more pomp and circumstance, but he was just one of several hundred guests. These included Margit, the Caritas representative from Germany who came regularly to stay with Bishop Komarica and look after him, and a woman from Amsterdam, who was

spending her retirement years raising money for the Catholic diocese of Banja Luka by selling Bosnian crochet work. Despite the elegance of the Banski Dvor, and the presence of royalty, the occasion looked like a parish gathering for a Christmas pantomime.

When all the guests including Mayor Davidovic and President Cavic had arrived, four spritely middle-aged Italian men, with individual mikes, leapt on to the stage, and launched into a recital of spirituals and songs from the shows. They called themselves mockingly the *Mnogaja Leta*, 'Mature', *Quartet*. Part jazz, part crooning, part music hall, part revivalist, the performance in English was about well-known tunes and passionate delivery. The words were garbled, but vaguely familiar. The singers were imitating, and exaggerating, the accents and styles of stars from the past like Frank Sinatra. The audience was entranced. The tenor, a wisp of an elderly man with eyes kept shut throughout the performance, swayed jerkily to the rhythm, fingers clicking and feet tapping while he shook his head from side to side carried away by the music. The bass, in contrast, was a giant of a man with sonorous low notes suited to *Ol' Man River* which, as expected, brought the house down. The animated pianist singer, drenched with perspiration, face crimson from exertion throughout the concert, looked like a man possessed. Only the guitarist remained cool and went therefore almost unnoticed the whole evening.

Spirituals may remind us of their background, expressions of longing and faith by a people dispossessed and enslaved. When composers include them in compositions such as Michael Tippett in *A Child of Our Time*, or Bach interpolating his *Passions* with chorales, hymns everyone in the congregation would have known, or Dvorak weaving the essence of spirituals into his *New World Symphony*, they inspire moments of communal reflection in which sorrow and pain are shared in acts of collective mourning. Towards the end of the concert the quartet sang *Dry Bones*. The words

were apt. Bosnia was littered with bones. New mass graves were being discovered and the world press published photographs of shelves on shelves of sacks containing unidentified human remains. The spiritual refers to the passage in the Old Testament where the prophet Ezekiel ponders the valley of dry bones, and God's power to bring them to life.

The audience could not be left with such desolation, so the old men lifted everyone's spirits with a rousing *When The Saints go Marching In*.

Machiavelli, the shrewd analyser of political spin, observed that the wisest rulers know the difference between lies and truth however practised they might be at deception. He pointed out that once rulers believed their lies, then it was only a matter of time before the people became aware of their oppression, and would rise up to topple them.

Every guest at the concert received a sheet of paper with a formal welcome to Banja Luka from the mayor. No one could fail to be struck by the discrepancy between his vision of the town and the reality. Perhaps he had written it with sincerity, but he could not possibly have believed his spin.

'Welcome to Banja Luka, the city with the wide-open gates, pure heart and honest soul,' began the paper. Who was welcome? Adnan had been intimidated by gangsters, Muslim returnees were regularly being beaten up and harassed, and the Croat schoolteacher Jadranka Molnar's front door had been daubed with anti-Catholic graffiti. The gates of Banja Luka were wide-open only to Bosnian Serbs. In the light of the recent ethnic cleansing the idea of the city's 'pure heart and honest soul' could raise only a sarcastic laugh.

The mayor wrote in a sentimental vein about Banja Luka: its four rivers, tree-lined streets, richness of culture and beauty. A statement about the town fighting many

difficulties for five centuries made oblique reference to Turkish oppression. 'You can see Banja Luka's smile but you cannot see its tears,' the paper continued, implying that only the Serbs had suffered. The paper made no reference to the seventy thousand Muslims and Catholics who had been expelled from their homes and country.

However the paper ended with a warm welcome to the guests, and the Pope in particular, even though he represented one of the communities the Serbs ethnically cleansed. The mayor recognized the need for Banja Luka to be a European city: 'From this evening on the city of the world.'

Bishop Komarica may have run his eyes over the statement and smiled, saying, as he had done after a similar insensitive moment at the consultation in Coventry: 'If that was all we had to worry about we would have no problems.'

THE BEATIFICATION OF IVAN MERZ

Unlike crowds at a football match, the multitude welcomed the Holy Father with hymn singing. A battalion of nuns waved banners vigorously over their heads. The face of a pale shy young man, taken from an old black and white photo, stared out from the flags. He reminded everyone that the main purpose of the Pope's visit was to beatify Ivan Merz, a priest who died a century ago. His claim to sainthood consisted of working with young people and encouraging their interest in Catholicism, giving new direction to a youth movement: the Croatian Eagles. Ivan Merz died as a young man before nationalism and religion cemented a sinister alliance that continues to the present day, poisoning politics in a way that generates violent consequences.

During the mass Pope John Paul II ordered the drawing of a large curtain at the rear of the stage to reveal a monumental painting of Ivan Merz. Angels fly above the timid young man in grey. The naïve style of painting cuts his legs short at the calves. This gives the impression that he has no feet, or is rising from a grave.

Catholicism has two distinct art cultures. One is sophisticated and baroque, inspired by celebrated Renaissance artists, Raphael in particular, providing the template of idealized young mothers floating ethereally above earthly matters, and enraptured older men in swirling robes. Framed with extravagant quantities of precious stones, gold, silver, and surrounded by marble carvings, they fill places of worship. The painting of Ivan Merz represents the other culture which deals with the ordinary lives of the masses of poor people who make up the majority of the congregation. Sometimes these cultures exist side by side, as in the pilgrimage church of Mariahilf in southern Austria. Baroque sophistication adorns the interior of the church, where worship takes place, while the painstakingly executed amateur paintings of everyday suffering, the reality of harsh existence, cover the walls of the corridors and staircases that surround the nave. A vision of the Virgin Mary, replicating the doll in a jewelled tea cosy behind the altar, appears in all the pictures, but quite small, like a ghost floating in the sky above whatever scene of illness or horrific accident takes up the main narrative of each painting. Visitors pay small attention to the baroque decorations, and even less to the more significant and expressive art of the poor and powerless. Embarrassed by these reminders of poverty and suffering, tourists prefer to visit the 'Schatzkammer', the cabinet of treasures, which proudly displays gifts of expensively jewelled chalices and priestly robes sumptuously embroidered with pearls and gold thread, donated by rich benefactors, kings, and emperors. For those inclined to look and appreciate, the proximity of these aesthetic traditions raises questions about the relationship between religion, politics and society, rich and poor.

The mass being celebrated in the field outside Banja Luka ended with a procession of people being ushered into the Pope's presence, each to receive a blessing, and many presenting him with their own lovingly created painting and artefacts, such as peacock feathers, and photographs in gilt frames. A cumbersome carving of a saint

caused consternation when it fell out of its wrapping. Several bishops and bystanders wrestled it to the ground: a scene out of a Fellini film. Pope John Paul calmly continued to bless the rows of men and women who had been chosen for this honour because of individual acts of courage or piety: a Catholic variation on the British honours list.

The searing heat caused some stress. An elderly woman, who resembled Joan Hickson's Miss Marple, wearing a spotted blouse and a hat festooned with cloth flowers, watched with furious disapproval as guests from the international community, dignitaries and families, myself and Adnan were being ushered into the row of chairs behind her. She insisted we had been given seats belonging to her family and shouted shrilly, brandished her arms, and pointed with a jabbing finger. Eventually she sat down, fanning herself vigorously with a programme, and continued to complain and shake her head throughout the ceremony.

Several members of the international community were annoyed and embarrassed to be sitting next to me. They included Claire Fromentin, the European Union representative in Banja Luka, and her colleague from Mostar, a grey haired man who alternately dozed his way through the ceremony then woke up to reprove people in front for standing on their chairs to take photographs of the Pope.

Claire Fromentin had been unwilling to help us, rejecting our plans to invite the leaders to Coventry for a consultation, telling us we would not succeed. She accused the Muslim community of being provocative, and therefore to blame for having stones thrown at them during the first laying of the foundation stone for the Ferhadija Mosque in May 2001, and which killed an elderly man. European Union policy was to keep the peace and status quo, even when it meant blaming the victims for their suffering. Claire Fromentin sat next to me with a look of grim resentment. In the long

hour before the service started, she talked about the psychotic priest and the blood-stained ground where we sat, declaring the event should not be taking place.

Just before the Pope arrived, the choir performed a traditional Bosnian song which came from far back in time and deep within the soil. We had heard this earthy call a year earlier at the opening of a rebuilt Catholic church, when two farmers silenced the crowds with a hair-raising sound, made more ferocious by being sung in discordant seconds with mysterious quarter tones, not harmonious thirds. Such music is not nationalistic but folkloric, rare to find in Europe today. It is kept alive in the Balkans, transcending differences of religion and community, and shared by people from the mountains of Slovenia to the shores of the Black Sea, across Romania and Bulgaria, and down the Adriatic coast to Greece.

Friends of Bishop Komarica sat in the front rows. Margit in an airy blouse and straw hat, flushed with the heat, looked around to see who had come. ‘Is that Doris Pack?’ she muttered to me with a pout. ‘I hate her!’ She pointed at the German Member of the European Parliament, who supported Bishop Komarica and the Catholic Church, while excoriating the Orthodox Church which she blamed for the war. I could not understand the reason for Margit’s hatred, except that perhaps the German MEP claimed too much of Bishop Komarica’s attention. After the previous night’s concert with the aged Italian crooners Margit had winked at me conspiratorially, declaring ‘Yes it was nice, but I’ve had quite enough!’ before walking off with a dismissive gesture of the hand. I loved Margit’s candour.

Anna Aerts-Volkers, the woman selling Bosnian crochet work to raise funds for the bishop, arrived with her adolescent son and an aged mother, who looked alarmingly frail. The sun beat mercilessly down on the deepening crimson crown of her head, where just a few floating white wisps of hair gave scant protection. However she smiled stoically, proud to be there. Rows of idle ambulances, parked around the site,

indicated that despite it being one of the hottest days of summer, not one in the crowd of tens of thousands, all cheering and enduring a lengthy outdoor mass, succumbed to the heat.

Providing distraction from the sea of white caps and flags waving, a group of four young members of a bearded Russian Orthodox sect stood on the sidelines. Grabbing media attention on the streets of Banja Luka the day before by parading in dazzling blue and white robes and cradling a statue of the Virgin Mary, the group explained to anyone who approached them that they represented a minor part of the Orthodox Church which worshipped Our Lady, and sought closer links with the Catholic Church. They followed the Pope wherever he travelled. They believed in chastity and virginity. Pictures in their literature showed them surrounded by beautiful young women. The men smiled cheerfully at everyone and tried to make converts.

Bishop Komarica's introductory speech welcomed the Pope and consisted mainly of a long and robustly intoned list of complaints about the lack of returnees. The guests from the international community had listened to the bishop day in and day out. The issue of justice would never go away as long as he carried on speaking. The bishops from Bosnia and Croatia seated in rows presented an intimidating display of ecclesiastical machismo. Far from being servants of the Lord, they appeared to be warlords in ecclesiastical robes. In contrast, gentle and kindly Bishop Komarica hovered solicitously round the Pope, ready at a moment's notice to remove sheets of paper as they were read and discarded during the Pope's sermon. The bishop spoke clearly and robustly in contrast to the Pope, who uttered each word slowly with a slight blur of consonants, a consequence of his recent stroke. Despite this disability, he read from the Bosnian translation with comprehension. His mind seemed alert, the spirit willing while his body was collapsing.

The service then proceeded at a snail's pace till Adnan's patience ran out. He nudged me before slipping away and hissed in my ear: 'Even if it's God next time, I'm not coming!'

Just as the Pope prepared to leave, Bishop Komarica urgently waved his hands for Mufti Camdzic, an accompanying imam, and lastly Donald, to come up to the podium for a blessing. Pope John Paul fixed Donald with one penetrating eye, the other being weak from his stroke. Bishop Komarica whispered something to the Pope, perhaps telling him of Donald's responsibility for the event taking place. The Pope then suddenly stretched out his right arm and grasped Donald's hand in a tight grip.

As the Pope on his throne was being carried away from the podium, the bishop stretched out his arms to the tens of thousands, and silently put his thumbs in the air, as much as to say: 'We did it! He came! If we can do this we can do anything!' At that moment the crowds roared as though a goal had been scored at a Cup Final, flags waved frantically, and the nuns with white baseball caps jauntily pressed over their wimples also screamed and brandished their arms.

The Pope went on to meet the Reis and Bishop Jefrem, separately and privately. The Republika Srpska police lined the road to the airport, and the visit passed smoothly.

'We would like to kill the Pope,' Bosnian Serb extremists had told the international press days earlier, 'but SFOR will do it and blame us.'

Valentin Inzco, then Austrian ambassador in Sarajevo who would later be High Representative, offered to drive us to Zagreb. Cultured, considerate, he told us about his wife, Bernarda Fink, a Slovenian mezzo-soprano with a beautiful voice, world-famous as a subtle interpreter of Lieder. Dressed casually in shorts that showed off his muscular, mountain-climbing legs, Valentin spoke optimistically about Bosnia's future and occasionally stopped the car to thank the policemen standing guard on the road every hundred yards. 'It is important to give praise where it's due,' he declared.

Less confrontational than High Representative Paddy Ashdown, Inzco would nine years later repeal legislation which punished corrupt politicians. This had the effect of weakening the role of his office, so enabling President Milorad Dodik to push forward his own aim of detaching the Republika Srpska from the rest of Bosnia.

FATHER SATAN

In 1942, at the height of the Second World War, when it seemed Germany would conquer all of Europe, a Franciscan friar Tomislav Filipovic Majstorovic led a cohort of Croatian fascist pro-German militia through the streets of Banja Luka in a massacre of more than two thousand Orthodox men, women and children.

As he did so he is supposed to have said: 'This is the way I baptise these bastards in the name of God'. He then cut the children's throats. He was known as Father Satan.

In appreciation of his behaviour the Croatian and German fascists appointed him commandant of Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp in the Balkans situated on the border between Croatia and Bosnia. Here up to a million Serbs, Jews and Muslims were tortured and killed, many in the most barbaric manner.

All that remains of the camp now is a vast deserted field dominated by a colossal, concrete monument of an angel which looked like a bird of prey. A typical Bosnian war memoria, it is an oppressive reminder of atrocities.

Friar Tomislav lived in the monastery of Petricevac, that overlooks the field where the Papal Mass took place. For this reason, Claire Fromentin, and many in the international community as well as outraged Serbs in Banja Luka, felt it inappropriate, even provocative, to hold the mass there.

Therefore it was essential that Pope John Paul II make a point of apology.

History bears particularly heavily on the present in Bosnia, and for the last six decades there has been no public discussion about what happened. Bosnian Serb

forces made sure to blow up the monastery before the end of the Bosnia War, seizing the opportunity to destroy the building from which the psychopathic friar led massacres. Without discussion there can be no reconciliation. History rankles in the Orthodox Church. Patriarch Pavle, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, refused to meet the Pope on this visit.

RETURN TO ROME

The haunches of a gigantic horse fill the dark canvas, and in the top right hand corner, the face of a groom, trying to control the beast rearing in terror, looks down seemingly unperturbed at a man lying on his back, in danger of being trampled by the horse's hooves. The foreshortening of the prone body compresses the man so he seems crushed by the weight of what dominates the picture. A flash of lightning, not painted, illuminates the fallen figure in a harsh light, which is then reflected in the face of the groom. Both would otherwise be in darkness.

Caravaggio is depicting the moment during Paul's journey to Damascus, on his mission to crush Christians, when the future saint hears the voice of God in the heavens saying: 'Why Paul do you persecute me?' He falls from his horse, and is immediately converted.

On the facing wall of this small chapel, in a dark corner of the church of S Maria del Popolo in Rome, Caravaggio has painted a naked old man, nailed upside down on a cross. Both pictures express terror and trauma against a shadowy world of menace and chaos. Paul is at the mercy of his horse; Peter, the crucified apostle, is at the mercy of two burly men focusing their attention on crucifying him, one of them turning the back of his sweaty muscular body, broad brown buttocks and dusty soles of feet towards the viewers, pressing them against our faces. There is nothing transcendent or

glorious about what these two saints are experiencing. The unconventional proportions allow the secondary characters to take up most of the space, emphasising the vulnerability of the main subjects. The pictures, painted while Caravaggio was on the run from people who would eventually catch up and kill him, are difficult to find in the church. Perhaps they were deemed too shocking for public view, and sited in the most obscure space available.

At the opposite end of the church are sculptures of saints in extravagantly animated robes and making flamboyant gestures of erotically charged spiritual ecstasy. There is also a large painting of the *Nativity* by Pinturicchio. Landscapes stretch into the distance, nature at its most abundant and varied. Domestic animals are depicted with as much care as the mother and child. People, beasts and fertile earth, are all bathed in light at this moment of miraculous birth: a celebration of the divine and the everyday. There cannot be a more extreme contrast in one and the same building between the Pinturicchio and the Caravaggio: the one radiant and harmonious, the other brutal, disruptive, and out of kilter. The one painter depicts a dream of perfection; the other shows the reality of dangerous violence and the fatal obstinacy of sainthood.

Pinturicchio celebrates natural order: Caravaggio describes chaos. Looking at both made me think about our vulnerability and naivety trying to make a difference in a world where political and economic interests define the 'tide of history'. On the other hand it would be encouraging, despite failure, criticism and mockery, to see ourselves going with the 'grain of the universe', a phrase used by Rowan Williams.

The imposing, spacious, marble-columned and dark wood panelled reception hall of the Hotel Mediterraneo is a reminder of Rome's totalitarian past: Mussolini marching up and down long corridors, and crushing opposition. The hotel's monumental plain grey facade oppresses with the bleak undecorated functionalism depicted in Edward

Hopper's paintings. The artist's people inhabit similar urban spaces, figures isolated as though stranded. But being Italy, people take possession of such buildings and fill the grand dining room with noisy families. Children sit with parents late into the night and share food from each other's plates. Everyone talks at the same time at the top of their voices, refusing to be intimidated by their surroundings.

The World Islamic Call Society, which had an office close by, booked us into this hotel for a meeting with Muftah Abuaisha and the Libyan representative in Rome to discuss taking our partnership further. The plan was to establish a larger European joint project: specifically a presentation at Brussels planned for later in the year. This event would launch us on the next stage of our work: creating a network of inter-faith groups from all over Europe involved in practical collaboration. It took its inspiration from our Ferhadija project, but the World Islamic Call Society was less interested in anything we were doing in Bosnia than on improving relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. The Brussels Consultation would lay the seed for our future activities beyond Bosnia.

Like students enjoying being away from the strictures of home and college, and in particular liberated from the oppressive eye of the Leader, Muftah Abuaisha and Mansur Tantush, the World Islamic Call Society's representative in Rome, were relaxed and more expansive than in Tripoli. They had already thought of budgets and drafted an agreement which promised to fund us for the months leading to the Brussels event, assuring us of support in future collaborations on projects throughout the world not just in Europe.

We planned the event to include presentations from both the Soul of Europe and the World Islamic Call Society. We agreed on numbers of people to be invited, and drafted a program. Most of the time we discussed the design of the invitation, which needed to include both our emblems in such a way that people would recognize our

partnership. We also looked ahead to a follow up an event in Tripoli where the new network could reconvene, at which members could update on their particular projects and prepare the next stages.

Mansur Tantush already knew Romano Prodi, the European President in Brussels, through Italian contacts. Libya's relationship with most of Europe was improving steadily, if discreetly, but the event in Brussels would be the first high profile event of its kind for the country. Gaddafi could never shake off his reputation as supporter of international terrorism: the Lockerbie bombing rankled permanently in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, large oil deposits in the deserts of Libya offered a temptation too great to resist, and western countries were waiting for an opportunity to make friends with their former enemy.

Over supper in the hotel Muftah Abuaisha spoke about his family: specifically preparations for a daughter's wedding. This huge tribal affair with a large banquet would last for many days. Muftah looked forward to it with mixed feelings of pride and panic.

The thought of all this planning and bustle made Muftah think wistfully about the peace of the desert, a place where the prophets of Islam could escape from worldly demands and responsibilities. 'In the desert there is nothing between you and God,' he explained.

We spoke about Jesus and also Mohammed in the desert.

For the medieval Persian poet Nizami, the desert is a place where the issues of life and death, good and evil engage in perpetual conflict. This either destroys, or brings one to a better understanding of self: what makes each human being unique, and so helps us resist forces which threaten. For the prophets the desert represents a meeting place with God. For Nizami, specifically in his *Story of Beautiful Mahan*, it becomes a

meeting place with one's better self. The extremes of danger and suffering offer an opportunity. The desert forces us to face our demons. All unnecessary, usually material, baggage is stripped from us. We come to terms with issues of life and death, our frailty and fear, and realize the humanity that is the core of our being.

A LETTER TO MY FATHER

WHAT WE DID IN OCTOBER 2003

This is a peculiar letter I'm sending you, in that it's actually a report of my last two journeys and visits which I'm trying to write about in a different way. The visit to Libya was of such massive importance, especially the chance to understand a different world perspective on East/West, Muslim/West, rich/poor; all the issues that dominate the world today, that it needs a long chapter all to itself. I'll certainly send you that when it's done, but it's almost impossible right now to find the space and leisure needed to write this part of the book.

Since then, there has been the ceremony at Lambeth Palace, when the Archbishop gave Donald a special degree. And then there followed a short but pithy visit to Bosnia to prepare for a presentation we're giving in Brussels in December.

So I thought I'd try and entertain you by writing about those two special visits, killing two birds with one stone: write to you, and at the same time compose these reports in a way that might be interesting and relevant.

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Just as you go into Lambeth Palace there is a gigantic fig tree spreading all over the wall on the left of the entrance. Luckily we arrived on a late summer day with ripe fruit falling off the tree, so I gorged on the wasted treasure: nothing like biting into a soft fig, sweet, ever so slightly crunchy. DH Lawrence loved them. (You have to read

Lady Chatterley's Lover to know why!) No one seemed to be noticing this great tree, and it pained me to think that the fruit would be left to rot.

We've known Rowan Williams the Archbishop for many years. He advised Donald in the early stages of the Urban Ministry Project. Do you remember those days? All those priests being chucked on to the streets of London for a couple of days and nights with just a fiver in their pockets, the object being to experience life from the underside, however briefly, but also learning about their own limits. I'd have cheated, but that too would have been part of the learning experience. In fact some priests did cheat, but they kept quiet about it. Then there followed the process of examining work, life and their constituency, on the model of analysis, reflection, issues and action: ARIA for short. I provided some cultural entertainment, getting them all to be creative, painting and thinking differently. I was really too young and naïve, so look back on those days with some shame. However a number of priests told me years later they had been inspired by my sessions. Most remained unconvinced. Senior clergymen in my last group were only too glad to express their disappointment with my contribution. Rowan Williams used to provide theological reflection. Young and intellectual he was lecturing in Oxford at the time. He also aided Donald in a theological audit of Donald's ministry at St James's Church Piccadilly. All that people could remember of his presentation of the audit was how he never looked at anyone while he spoke, but kept glancing over his shoulder as though embarrassed. He is an admirer of Donald. St James's had a reputation for supporting a host of liberal causes, not to speak of outlandish projects loosely gathered under the umbrella of Turning Points, a safe sounding title for New Ageism: moon worshipping, barefoot dancing, witches giving talks, and diluted Sufi spirituality. So the timing of bestowing the degree on Donald put the Archbishop in a difficult position with his critics, all too keen to stir controversy about the award. Rowan made a point of reading a substantial

citation commending Donald's life in detail and making some nicely humorous points, such as remembering Donald's suggestion of forming a 'naughty vicar's society' for turbulent priests: those mavericks who were always getting into trouble with their bishops because of complaints from outraged members of the public. The former Archbishop, George Carey, never supported Donald and only grudgingly wrote a letter of introduction for when we went to Serbia at the start of our project. Now we have an actively encouraging Archbishop throwing his weight behind us, always recommending us to people such as the Emir of Qatar, who might be persuaded to support us financially: fingers crossed! Rowan has even offered to visit Banja Luka, which would be a huge honour for that depressing little provincial town.

Rowan offered to host a party for Donald's 70th birthday party in May next year, which is a chance to invite all the main players from our projects to England.

It's interesting inside Lambeth Palace: all those portraits of former Archbishops, a mostly ferocious bunch with a particularly fine painting of Archbishop Ramsey, whom you met when he was Archbishop of York all those years ago, the one with vigorous eyebrows. I remember you sending me a letter when I was a boy and you drew cartoons of the two then primates, the one from York being round and fat and the one from Canterbury even rounder and fatter! The Archbishop before George Carey, Ronald Runcie, liked Donald and we visited on several occasions. In his time, the palace was a home, a large one. His wife, a concert pianist and teacher, kept it domestic, loudly announcing to groups of visiting eminences that she had to go down the corridor to finish ironing the Archbishop's shirts. Rowan is clearly not used to such luxury and space, so the palace feels deserted and cold. He restricts himself and his family of wife and two children to a few rooms, separated from the rest by a screen. His wife, a distinguished academic, emerged from behind this screen, almost apologetically, looking exhausted and overwhelmed by the place and the task. When

Donald asked her: 'Are you all right?' she replied directly: 'Not really!' and gave a wan little smile. She may have been referring to the approaching meeting with all the bishops of the Anglican Communion, summoned by Rowan to Lambeth to discuss the issue of homosexual bishops and the threat of schism, or she just found the whole place dispiriting.

The awards ceremony began with a gathering of guests in the palace grounds. They crossed large lawns that are traditionally planted with chamomile to keep them green in dry weather. Donald's guests included Margaret Stevens who brought liturgical dance into the Anglican Church way back in the 1970's at St Peter's Church Morden. I remember her dancing to Holst's *Mars* from *The Planets*, whirling her arms like a discus thrower and pounding the church floor. Andrew Barr, a film director for the BBC, became a friend at the same time, and holds in the back of his considerable memory a vast archive of incidents, horrors, mistakes, and amusing anecdotes from Donald's years as vicar at St Peter's and rector at St James's. The youngest guest at the ceremony was Damian Thompson, a journalist on the Daily Telegraph, who used to lambast Donald mercilessly in the early years, mocking the New Ageism and moon-worshipping. Donald got so fed up with these attacks that he invited Damian to lunch after which Damian turned into one of Donald's most vociferous supporters in the press, despite both of them being at opposite ends of the political spectrum.

Damian supports Bush, Blair and the war in Iraq.

Four other church figures were receiving honours from the Archbishop at the same service. One of them was involved in research into the paranormal and religion: a life's work which baffled most of the guests. When the citation talked about Donald's attention to the liturgy this man turned to Donald, who happened to be sitting next to him, and hissed sarcastically: 'I didn't know you did religion at St James's!'

The ceremony took place against a background of threatening schism in the Anglican Church, all because of the appointment of a gay bishop in the United States. The Archbishop could not have prevented this appointment, even if he had wanted to, because, as Donald told me, the Episcopal Church in America can ‘appoint a cat as bishop’ and not be stopped by anyone. Despite this absurd unpleasantness the Archbishop looked relaxed. He enjoyed the awards ceremony because he could honour people he liked personally.

A funny incident broke the solemnity of the occasion. In the long silence during which guests waited for the Archbishop to process with Donald and the other awardees into the chapel, and while I was looking at the Leonard Rosoman murals, which reminded me of the trial of my paintings at St Peter’s (do you remember, his moving and spirited defence of them saved my mural), we became aware of a severe tapping on the marble floor which grew louder and more menacing as it approached the chapel. Could this be the Archbishop banging his crozier as the procession marched towards us? Eventually the clatter arrived and everyone turned in curiosity only to see a figure familiar from the tabloids, as unexpected as her approach was theatrical: the wife of Jeffrey Archer, the hugely successful millionaire pulp-fiction author, and disgraced lord. This woman with a percussive pair of high heels knew how to make an entrance. None of us could have been more surprised if Saddam Hussein or even Osama bin Laden had followed Mary Archer into the chapel. She must have been a friend of one of the awardees. You know who Lord Jeffrey Archer is of course. He was involved in a scandal involving a prostitute, denied it, and took a tabloid to court, winning half a million pounds in a successful libel action; then, shortly afterwards, a disgruntled friend admitted how he had lied to protect Archer, and the lord ended up with a two year sentence for perjury. In the libel trial the judge famously described Lady Mary Archer as ‘fragrant’. Donald had a run-in with Lord

Archer, who gave him a rough ride before the scandal broke. On one of his many fundraising missions, Donald visited Archer in his luxury apartment overlooking the Thames, only to be told by the millionaire that Donald was just one of hundreds who came begging. Lord Archer sent the Soul of Europe packing with a flea in its ear, so I felt schadenfreude when the disgraced lord ended up in jail. The 'fragrant' Lady Mary defended her husband robustly throughout his trials and imprisonment, planning revenge on his enemies. On this occasion in Lambeth Palace, Lady Archer fragrant as ever grabbed our attention. Then the service could begin.

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Since then Donald has been travelling all over Europe meeting people who will take part in the Brussels event: a gathering of groups of Muslims and non-Muslims trying to collaborate on projects similar to our own in Bosnia. The Ferhadija will be a flagship project. The issue is now an urgent priority in the post 9.11 era; made more problematic by the Bush-Blair invasion of Iraq and the subsequent outrage felt across the Islamic world. So people across Europe are showing interest in what we are doing, and keen to come to this presentation. It will be introduced by our colleagues in Bosnia, and will describe the way different communities are working successfully together there, despite the war in which they were slaughtering each other.

While Donald visited groups in Norway, I returned to Bosnia with Peter Ashby, the man who so brilliantly facilitated our conference in Coventry in September 2001. We met with the Banja Luka civic forum, which we established earlier this year as part of our project to encourage cross-community collaboration and to help develop democratic processes which will bring their corrupt and often criminal rulers to heel. As you can imagine, this is not easy; and that's an understatement. Corruption is endemic, particularly in the place we are working. Banja Luka is still controlled by those people who committed the atrocities in the war. Think of Germany in the post

war years still being in the charge of Goebbels and Goering, and you have a picture of what is happening in Bosnia. During our meeting with the two women running the civic forum, both tough, experienced and intelligent, we learned that the governing assembly refuses public access to its deliberations. That is no democracy.

Predominantly men stand up, and deliver speeches for the sake of the media, then carry on with their own nefarious businesses, which keep them in expensive cars, large properties, and luxury life-styles, while the rest of the people scrape along as best they can. There is mostly a black economy in Banja Luka, and this just perpetuates the sleaze and lack of progress.

But the civic forum is not giving up. They have already initiated public meetings (already a first in Bosnia) at which people have shared their experiences of being ousted from their homes, and the problems returning to them. This is a particularly traumatic issue in Bosnia, and I myself feared there would be repercussions, rows, fights and persecution again. But in fact the people were so pleased with these early attempts, talking about what matters most to their lives, that more meetings are planned in the future. The civic forum will continue to barrack the politicians and the assembly, so eventually they are allowed to be present at the decision-making process. This has to happen if Bosnia wants to enter Europe as a democratic country. The international community backs us for the time being. This is why the British government has been funding us these last two years.

We met in a jazz cellar, where an extraordinary exhibition mounted by the civic forum displays a collection of old photographs of the town of Banja Luka pre-Second World War, showing it to have been a multi-cultural centre: Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic living together, mosques, churches and even synagogues, side by side. Since the war, Radovan Karadjic's party now in charge had tried to rewrite the history of the town: the end of the war being year zero. Banja Luka was to be an ethnically cleansed

region, only Orthodox living there, all Catholics and Muslims got rid of. So this exhibition might cause controversy, but as yet no one has complained. In fact, since we've been working in Banja Luka, two mosques have been rebuilt; a stunning fact, given that, when we first arrived three years ago, it was dangerous even to mention Islam. Either the Soul of Europe is having an effect there, or the people have miraculously changed. We seem to be having a bit of influence. When the plans for the first mosque to be rebuilt came before the municipal authorities for building permission, the officials refused to sign the papers and kept postponing. Eventually, the Islamic community, a tiny remnant of what used to be the majority, became impatient and, knowing that we were coming shortly, warned the authorities of our arrival saying: 'You had better sign, the Soul of Europe is coming next week.' Amazingly the authorities did sign! So the first mosque has now been built. The second is on its way. However, the great Ferhadija Mosque presents a bigger challenge, as it is a heritage project, and was one of the most beautiful buildings in the former Ottoman Empire. That project has to be European and a symbol of future collaboration, justice, and inter-religious tolerance.

I watched mostly middle-aged and elderly people coming in small groups to view the photographs. This required some intelligence and persistence, because the jazz club was hard to find. The people were delighted at identifying a town they remembered well, pointing out familiar landmarks no longer existing, destroyed. The forum would have preferred the photos to be shown at the central gallery in the main public building, the Banski Dvor, but the authorities resisted. All kinds of excuses were made: the place needed decorating; it had to be closed at certain times, etc. We expected these obstacles, as the pictures defied the present rewriting of history in Banja Luka. So part of the collection was put on display in a place which did not fear

to have them: a jazz club where young people gather, those who do not care about the authorities, which are made up mostly of their parents.

We covered a lot of business on this short visit. Peter Ashby had to learn fast, and he rowed frequently with Adnan, who is easily riled by patronising attitudes from foreigners. Donald and I make a point of listening to him, to learn what we don't know, even when he sometimes seems to speak rubbish (he has a weakness for conspiracy theories, which I ignore). Peter Ashby makes a point of arguing every point. The one thing I've learned is that the more oppressed, the more a community has suffered, the greater the intelligence, thoughtfulness, and wisdom is called for: and this means listening and thinking.

Our representative from Brussels, Jenny Lee Spencer, a bright young woman just a few years out of college and already experienced in the labyrinthine complexities of European Union politics, would sit quietly through these futile arm-wrestling arguments and it was a relief to catch her eye and wink at her. I find these rows wearisome. At the end of hours of wrangling and unpleasantness, peppered with personally offensive remarks, everyone reaches the decision I had already planned at the start. I raise my eyes to the ceiling, sigh, and wish the time could have been better spent, not necessarily in profitable work, but more pleasurably: drinking local brandy, and talking about our lives.

Just as the Lambeth Degree ceremony did not go without incident, so the same on this latest visit to Banja Luka. It served to remind me, in case I was becoming too optimistic and complacent, that the town is still in the grip of corruption and gangsters and is far from being a safe place to do business, or our kind of work.

The incident was more of an encounter, and thankfully happened after Adnan left for Sarajevo, taking Jenny Lee with him, lucky woman. She would enjoy the spectacular drive through the Vrbas Gorge, then across the mountains of central Bosnia and on to

the capital. I took Peter Ashby to one of Banja Luka's best restaurants situated by the river. The portions there are so large that we chose just a soup and a pancake. As we finished eating, two burly black-bearded hirsute thugs entered. Intentionally looking like Serb Chetniks who were proud to massacre Muslims and Croats in the war, they eyed us suspiciously, as though putting a value on us: what we might be carrying that would be worth stealing. My heart sank with fear then missed a beat, when their woman joined them. It turned out to be Radmila Karlas, whom Adnan had employed to help set up the civic forum. A tall and attractive woman in her thirties she had charmed herself into Adnan's good books, but turned into a disaster, running up outrageously high phone bills while Adnan was in Sarajevo, leaving her in charge of the office. She broke the computer then persuaded these two thugs to rough up Adnan, forcing him to hand over all the cash in the office. The few coins were not worth the mugging, but because he worked for an international organization, drove the Soul of Europe car, a Skoda Octavia, and liked to dress smartly in order to impress the politicians he dealt with, they assumed he had plenty of cash. Adnan was forced to vacate the office and change his mobile phone number.

Recognizing me, Radmila looked alarmed and nervous. Should I have ignored her, then run the risk of her sending the thugs after us, or accuse her, out of the question, or greet her politely? I decided to play safe, put her at ease, said hello, thanked her for the work she did, negligible though that was (in fact I could not think of anything she had actually done), and gave no indication that I knew about her friends mugging Adnan. I passed on greetings to her sister whom I liked. The thugs did not follow us into the darkness outside the restaurant. Perhaps they could not be sure who Peter Ashby was.

The sleaziness of Banja Luka where criminals could be brazen in public reminded me of Serbia before the fall of Milosevic, a time when gangsters openly ran the

country. In those days, and long before the war, middle-class Serbs came to spend pleasant vacations in Banja Luka, a town, as Adnan told us, famous for its mosques, spa waters and beautiful women.

26th October 2003

A SECOND LETTER TO MY FATHER ABOUT BRUSSELS, GERMANY, AND A MUGGING

NOVEMBER 2003

We are organizing a big event in Brussels, to which representatives of those European Muslim and Christian groups who are trying to collaborate and counteract the extremists on both sides will be invited. Given the present world situation, with America and England invading first Afghanistan and then Iraq, and terrorists blowing up people indiscriminately all over the place, our initiative seems both timely and also possibly too late, and too ineffective. But someone's got to do something other than just ringing hands.

I needed to travel to Brussels to help with practical matters, like finding accommodation for the groups, and planning the event. Don't worry, I'm not doing that on my own; in fact our representative in Brussels, Jenny Lee Spencer, is making the arrangements. She is a young woman, with experience of working in the European Parliament as an MEP assistant, a job her boyfriend now does. She knows her way around the Brussels labyrinth, but needed my advice and support.

The night before I travelled on to Duisburg in Germany's Ruhrgebiet, to meet with one of the groups attending the event, I was taking a walk round Brussels city centre when three Arab youths attacked, knocked me over, jumped on me, beat me up and took my purse. They ran off with it, also taking my mobile phone and shoulder bag which contained my diary and, ironically, a copy of *Brothers Karamazov* I carry

everywhere with me. Maybe they are now reading it and learning something! While they were beating me up, leaving me with lots of bruises, bleeding scratches and a torn pair of trousers, a passerby rang the police who arrived quite quickly. They managed to catch one of the thieves, but unfortunately the ones with the money and bag escaped. So I spent most of the night at the police station identifying the suspect and filling endless forms. The victim suffers more punishment at the hands of the police than the criminal these days. The criminals are treated with respect for their rights, and sit around drinking coffee, whereas I, the victim, was given nothing but a glass of water, which I had to beg for, and sat for hours answering questions and having to write detailed statements. Blood poured everywhere, but the police were not the slightest concerned. My aches and pains did not interest them. There is no question that the life of a criminal is easier than that of the victim.

This went on all night, and much of the next morning, until I caught the train to Duisburg.

Considering my work with Muslim communities in Europe, especially fighting people's fear of foreigners, it was for me a sad irony that it should have been Arabs and not white Belgians who mugged me. The police drove me round the Arab quarter in case I recognized my attackers and all I felt was shame, because the Arabs looked with fury at the police car and at me inside it. I can never forget the blazing eyes boring into me with contempt and hatred. They were evidently used to being harassed and blamed for any crime committed, even though on this occasion that was the case. Perhaps they felt that, since they were going to be blamed anyway, they might as well commit the crime.

The police found my emptied purse and bag by the roadside, but neither my mobile phone nor *Brothers Karamazov*. Someone may indeed be reading it! Fortunately I had left passport and most of my money in the hotel safe, so apart from bruises, shock,

and hours of unpleasant inconvenience, I could at least continue my journey: shaken but intact and not having lost too much.

The story of my mugging is not over.

Of course I was shattered, not just because of the attack and robbery, but also the sleepless night in the police station. I must have nodded off in the train and exactly as in *Emil and the Detectives* (you have guessed what happened), while I was not paying attention, a thief deftly slipped his or her hand in my jacket pocket, and took my passport, and the rest of the money I was carrying. I couldn't believe my bad luck. Even the police in Germany hearing the story about my misadventures in Brussels couldn't believe it. Though they too had to make me fill out huge forms and spend hours answering questions, they at least brewed me a nice cup of coffee, and expressed sympathy.

This double whammy rather knocked my confidence and even now I haven't got over it. I keep remembering my past misfortunes, like on that train journey from Kiev to Warsaw, when thieves held a knife to my throat, and several times at my Coffeehouse in Oxfordshire, where I became easy prey to business scammers, and lost several thousands of pounds. People seem to see me coming! This worries me. Lying in the hotel room at Duisburg, crying myself to exhaustion, paranoia made me think people might burst in and finish me off.

The Duisburg delegation, which would take part in the Brussels event, turned out to be such a lively, enthusiastic and special group of women: Muslims and Christians making a serious effort to understand each other and work together, that I forgot my troubles, aches, bruises, lack of money and fear of being without a passport, and felt the journey to have been worthwhile.

The following day the women took me round Duisburg, about the most uninteresting looking industrial town you can imagine: no landmarks, flat, grey, with acres of

factories mostly belonging to Thyssen. In the middle of this flatness and greyness, these feisty women were collaborating on a project of the imagination. Along an old railway line converted into a cycle path that runs between the site of a new mosque, still to be built, and a church with a spire, each visible to the other, a German Turkish artist, about my age, is working with children, elderly, community groups and disabled people etc on a series of sculptures which will line the path to make a sculpture garden. Already several pieces are in place, and the exhibition, when it is finished, will be one of the sights of Duisburg. At present this large city seems to lack any.

The Brussels event looks set to be interesting, and could lead to all sorts of future developments, particularly as the groups meet and create a network.

Back in Brussels, time had to be spent once again at the police station securing documents for insurance purposes, to prove I'd been robbed. There is no hope of being reimbursed. Insurance companies are only too keen to persuade us how generous they are in order to get their hands on our money, but as soon as any claim is made they suddenly stop being generous and question every last penny. They will no doubt come to the conclusion that I, as the victim, was actually to blame. So far they haven't even sent a claim form, which indicates a policy of dragging feet and hoping the victim will give up and go away.

At the British Embassy to pick up a replacement passport, I joined a long queue of people who had also been mugged and robbed of their passports. It seems as though Brussels is now the most dangerous city in Europe. The police told me they were so understaffed that criminals had a free ride across the city, and basically ran rings round the police. Judges can't convict any one because of insufficient evidence. Nor can they put them in prison when convicted because there are not enough cells. The law of the jungle applies here. This explained the police delight with my case because,

by fighting them off I had kept the thieves busy. This meant that the police got there in time to arrest at least one and were not going to let him off the hook. Having been preoccupied with defending myself during the mugging, I did not have time to look closely at my attackers and could barely recognize the man they arrested, so I hesitated to convict him. However at the British Embassy, noticing a frail Japanese girl who had suffered a similar attack, I became angry. I felt justified in stopping at least one hooligan from taking advantage of weak and defenceless people.

Jenny Lee and her boyfriend Charles, our efficient and enthusiastic helpers in Brussels, consoled me by taking me out to a quiet pleasant restaurant, and suddenly I found myself talking for hours about running the Coffeehouse in Oxfordshire, my paintings, and working with Donald.

This made up for the dark night of the soul I went through in Duisburg, when I lay on my bed, and expected the door to be broken down by louts who I could hear pacing noisily outside in the corridor. I made a pact with God that if he got me safely back to Devon I would never go on another journey. That promise made me cry uncontrollably. I realized how much I missed my painting, my creative life, my home and garden. The pact with God calmed me and eventually I fell asleep. Next morning the noisy louts, who had stamped about in the corridors all night, turned out to be travelling salesmen and business reps. They sat quietly at their breakfast tables tucking into generous quantities of sausages and cheese rolls, and washing everything down with pints of black coffee. They paid no attention to anyone.

The Duisburg women cheered and touched me. These thoughtful and determined young mothers were concerned about improving life and the world. They knew the future lay in their hands. They also knew that the future started with themselves and this group. The meetings were a kind of celebration, a sharing of meals and drink, setting aside whole evenings just to sit together, talk, argue, and get to know one

another. On the night I arrived, the Muslim women in the groups engaged in a heated argument about the significance for themselves and others of the right to wear or not to wear the hijab, the Muslim headscarf. One woman wore the hijab; the others did not. They pointing out that the veil signified the oppression of women, and subjugation to their men in the eyes of non-Muslims. All the women in the group were aware of the deeper and wider significance of these meetings, which touched on issues that are at present reinforcing divisions in the world.

All the groups coming to Brussels are experiencing difficulties and cultural misunderstandings, so the group from Duisburg might inspire them. One of the aims of the event is for groups to encourage each other. Since my visit, I discovered that Duisburg has the highest percentage of Muslims living there than in any other German city. Its nickname is now Istanbul-on-the-Rhine.

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At the time I was being mugged Prime Minister Blair and President Bush were polishing egos in London justifying the rightness of their policies and attending banquets. Thoroughly upholstered by security, the Texan didn't see anyone apart from carefully vetted guests.

The only hope I see at present is for the terrorists to make so many blunders with their own constituency that the Islamic world itself will be forced to deal with the issue, fed up that so many of their own are being blown up. One thing for sure is that the future lies with people communicating with each other across what divides them.

November 15th 2003

TA'ARUF

LIBYA SEPTEMBER 2003

The hotel Al Mahari overlooks the main road that follows the North African coast for over a thousand miles from Tangiers through Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli to Cairo, passing the ancient cities of Carthage, Sabratha and Leptis Magna, as well as places of more recent history: Tobruk and Alamein. The Mediterranean Sea stretches north, west and east to the horizon. The Libyan shore looked deserted with a rusting ocean liner moored in the harbour, and the sandy beaches deserted for hundreds of miles. The waters of this sea also lap the Costa del Sol, Cote d'Azur, Capri, the Dalmatian coast, Greek islands and the coast of Asia Minor all the way to the Holy Land: history and legends around this sea links races, faiths and cultures.

THE RAIN IN LEPTIS

On a previous visit to the impressive ruins of Leptis Magna, the searing heat kept visitors away, and we had the ruins to ourselves, treading deserted cobbled streets, passing through colonnades of massive pillars that once held roofs to cover palatial public baths and a market that catered to thousands of civilians. Then the sun beat down on us as we stood in what remained of the mighty basilica. We tested the ingenious acoustics of the grand amphitheatre from which a whisper could be heard in the most distant seats. We trudged across burning sand dunes where snakes had recently left their tracks to visit the Hunters' Bathhouse. The mosaics inside depict the emperor wrestling with lions. Before leaving Leptis we had stood on our own in the middle of the spacious forum and surveyed the wreckage of time: collapsed columns and headstones lying cracked on the ground amongst heaps of stones. We reflected on the inevitable end of empires and tyrannies. Less than ten years later Libya would oust

and kill Gaddafi, a dictator whose downfall no one could have predicted up to the moment when he was dragged out of a waste water pipe and dispatched.

On this visit we were not alone but part of a convoy of buses laid on to transport a large delegation from the Philippines to Leptis. This group constituted a major contingent of the conference in Tripoli. Not having been warned about the massive size of the site most of the group were too exhausted to complete the sightseeing. The sun did not shine and it began to rain. A few tiny figures holding umbrellas staggered across the forum.

Grey clouds added to the melancholy of the scene. Here a civilization lay in ruins. The noble proportions of a civic as well as imperial pride remain visible in the gaps between the towering columns that allowed for generous space for people to meet and conduct the various businesses of a thriving city: commerce, art, religion, and numerous leisure pursuits which once celebrated a sociable existence. People of North Africa had built this still visible and tangible splendour while enslaved by a foreign European power. Emperor Severus, the man who ordered the building of Leptis, was a native of Ancient Libya. He was proof that even a slave could reach the highest office of empire. This exception proved the rule. However glorious its art and social life, arrogant despotism rendered the empire vulnerable to resentment, attack and eventual destruction. Anyone can now see it for themselves on this promontory in North Africa where the azure Mediterranean Sea glitters in the sun or glowers metallically under grey clouds between the broken pillars of temples and civic buildings.

Before returning to Tripoli the coaches drove a further sixty or so miles eastward towards Cairo, taking the Philippine delegation and the rest of us to a steel mill.

We arrived to a lavish welcome, being ushered into a large hall furnished with deep armchairs. A coffee table stood by each chair. On each table was placed a tray of biscuits, sticky cakes, dates and glasses of milk and juice. An elderly man, wearing a

white djellaba that encompassed his wide girth, received such exaggerated flattering gestures of greeting from those guests who recognized him that for a moment I thought he was Colonel Gaddafi in grotesque disguise. Photographers took every opportunity to snap his picture. Bodybuilder guards in tight fitting t-shirts that barely covered their bulging deltoids kept a watchful eye on us. This evidently most eminent person welcomed us in flowery terms. While we nibbled the cakes and sipped the juices we listened to prolonged speeches about the importance of this steel mill in Africa, the largest in the continent, and watched a video about steel-making processes, rivers of molten ore cascading down channels surrounded by erupting storms of sparks.

We were told about a significant technical achievement and source of national pride: a water pipe-line hundreds of miles long which took water from a local aquifer all the way through the Sahara to Chad.

Smartly dressed waiters poured instant coffee before we were taken to a large cafeteria. Each place setting had a plate of olives and bread. The waiters served vegetable soup, tuna salad, fish cakes with boiled potatoes, and limes. These were just starters. The main course consisted of roast lamb and chicken with roast potatoes and courgettes. Cakes and fruit rounded off the lunch.

After this feast we collapsed into the coaches and waited to be taken back to Tripoli.

But before returning we were driven to inspect the steel mill, being driven all round the factory buildings, not a single worker to be seen. The whole place was deserted, not even a guard. This seemed more than just a Friday shut-down. Did anything happen here? A few long steel rods lay on the ground, but looked as though they had been there even before the factory had been built. They were half sunk in the sandy soil and grass grew over them. The coaches did not stop but continued the long drive round the bleak unused buildings before heading for the exit, where the large, elderly,

eminent man in the djellaba waved goodbye, surrounded by his bodyguards and other officials. Then the effects of the lunch overwhelmed everyone and sent us to sleep.

We woke up as the coaches approached Tripoli, the sun setting over the Mediterranean Sea. Darkness fell quickly. Family groups were laying out picnics under the date palms, lighting fires, and enjoying the evening cool. Shadowy figures crouching in the dunes seemed to be meditating. Others stood together in conversation. Several were fishing, facing the crimson horizon.

Libya is such a foreign country to Westerners, used to a totally different way of life. With the exception of colossal posters of the Leader there were no hoardings with advertisements to assault the eyes. Date palms lined the quiet roads that passed seemingly empty flats, mosques, and gardens surrounded by pale umber walls.

THAT YOU MAY KNOW EACH OTHER: TA'ARUF

O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). The Koran

Ten years after our final visit to Libya came Gaddafi's downfall; politics changed in Libya and would bring a period of chaos and uncertainty. The World Islamic Call Society still functions, under new leadership. However, our relationship with Libya had come to an end several years earlier. What follows is a record of a moment in history: as Pushkin put it 'nyevozvratno', never to return.

The conference consisted of a series of lectures on this text, delivered by academics and theologians from every part of the Muslim world. The speeches and formal discussions were filmed and recorded, translated and printed on the same day. A small group of representatives chosen by Dr Sherif, the chairman of the World Islamic Call Society, including Donald, drafted a resolution, summing up the findings, aims and

future objectives of the conference. Donald and I tried in vain to make the English translation less flowery and hyperbolic.

STUFF HAPPENS

Ta'aruf represents the pacific voice of Islam which existed ever since Mohamed founded the new faith. At present the belligerent shouts of extremists drowning out mainstream Islamic tolerance and declaring jihad remind the Christian world of crusades against Muslims. Such memories, steeped in blood and violence, tend now to suppress a history of positive inter-cultural relations that flourished over the following centuries. Since Christian fundamentalism underscores colonial western capitalism, Islamic terrorism gains support from those less developed countries which struggle under the economic hegemony of neo-liberal imperialists. The poor and disaffected are either unaware or prefer to ignore the fact that Islamic terrorism is bankrolled by wealthy Arabs with their own, also violently oppressive agendas.

Anthony Layden, the ambassador to Libya on this visit, listened carefully to our narration of events at the Ta'aruf conference, then let slip confidential information about Gaddafi's program for building a nuclear bomb.

We made a point of establishing relations with ambassadors wherever we travelled, not just out of courtesy or for security reasons. In Bosnia, Graham Hand and Ian Cliff gave us advice, information and support, as well as learning from what we told them. In the case of Libya we had to bear in mind the consequences of the Lockerbie bombing and the long years of diplomatic stand-off. The United States still included Libya in the 'axis of evil' and refused to have an embassy in Tripoli. The UK reckoned it would be more useful to keep a presence there, to foster even minimal relations with the Libyans, and also spy: specifically to monitor Gaddafi's acknowledged support for the Irish Republican Army and other terrorist groups. The

flights we took to Tripoli were full of Irish men, noisily tanking up on liquor before entering an alcohol-free zone. Most were businessmen, but a number could have been travelling for other reasons.

The ambassador informed us about the UK government's strenuous efforts to prevent development of Libya's nuclear program, going so far as to block import of fissile materials from the former Soviet Union via Serbia. This may have explained the presence on a previous visit of a group of Serbs staying at our hotel. He told us to be on our guard about the motivation behind Libya's support for the Soul of Europe. On the other hand the World Islamic Call Society was recognized as a bona fide organization, and we could consider ourselves lucky being supported by it.

The embassy building had been redecorated and the ambassador enthusiastically gave us a guided tour of the palatial apartments, built in the old colonial style and ranked among the grandest embassies anywhere. He relished pointing out to us the sophisticated luxury, the plush furnishings and acres of carpet. The place now looked like a reconstruction of a glamorous age when the UK had an empire and influence in the world. Full length royal portraits hung in the hallway with its centrepiece a regal staircase. Family and political photos covered a grand piano in the reception room. In the dining room a small table was laid for an intimate but formal lunch: starched napkins, rows of crystal glasses, and polished silver at each place setting.

On this visit the ambassador offered to entertain us when we next came, along with Dr Sherif. That never happened, and nine years later this magnificent residence was burnt and trashed during the Libya uprising which led to Gaddafi's overthrow and murder. The expensive refurbishment would last less than a decade.

THAT YOU MAY KNOW EACH OTHER: THE CONFERENCE

Intimidating elderly mullahs with long white beards and bushy eyebrows beetling over flashing dark eyes occupied most of the front row seats in the conference hall. Etched on their faces were years of handing down violent and capital punishments: so many thieves, homosexuals and adulterers stoned, tortured, and executed, that blood seemed to seep perpetually from the hands of these ruthless pursuers of what they believed to be divine justice. A few women in hijabs sat in silence here and there behind this intimidating array of religious machismo. Surrounding these women sat religious and political leaders from Africa. Dressed in voluminous robes and head-dresses they probably did not understand much of what was going on..

The hall was furnished with state-of-the-art television screens, translation booths, constant video coverage, and a sophisticated sound system. Young men created websites in adjoining rooms, nimble fingers scampering over keyboards conjuring complicated programs out of cyber space.

Some faces among the delegates were familiar from the media, including the leading mullah from Iran and Ben Bella, the legendary leader of the armed resistance movement that drove the French out of Algeria. The head cloths of the delegates from the Arab Middle East were held in place by lustrous gold bands; their white robes were the last word in minimal elegance. The less influential the African countries the more resplendent the dress: so the representatives from such places as Burkina Faso were ensconced in towering turbans and voluminous robes, dyed vivid green, orange, lemon yellow, purple, crimson and pale blue.

As the conference proceeded the delegates became less ceremonial. By putting on grey suits the Arabs seemed less distinguished, as though all light had gone out of them. From being princes they now looked like staff in a provincial office. The smaller countries however continued to appear in full regalia. They behaved like chief guests at a party but kept silent. Each head-dress had a particular character, with

subtle differences of proportion and shape. The Syrian mufti's fez had a refined grandeur reminiscent of a pharaoh's crown. This matched his flamboyant rhetoric.

Pushed to the back row sat Mufti Jusufspahic of Serbia and his son, an imam. We had met them in Belgrade in 2000 when the mufti had joined Patriarch Pavle and the Catholic bishop in blessing our journey to Bosnia. He and his son watched the proceedings with sad faces under modest Balkan fezes. The mufti looked old and ill, suffering from cataracts which prevented him from recognizing us until we came close. As soon as he realized who we were he seized hold of us with unexpected vigour and gave us passionate kisses on both cheeks. He told us that Dr Cerić had decided not to attend the conference. This might have been a snub. As with Turkey his relations with Libya were strained. The Belgrade mufti had ample time to come to Tripoli. His community was small and neglected, and he did not have the authority of Dr Cerić, who now played the role of chief representative of Islam in Europe. The mufti's son looked taller and stronger than ever next to the dwindling figure of his ailing father. He also pulled us to his expansive chest in welcome. When Donald's turn came to give a speech he brought the conference down to earth from the elaborate and flowery interpretations of Ta'aruf, by reminding everyone of the continuing suffering endured by the Islamic communities in Europe, especially Serbia where Muslims still had no graveyard to bury their dead. The sidelined mufti and imam of Belgrade looked at us with gratitude. 'If that is all you had done we would be forever grateful to you,' declared the imam afterwards.

Zaki Badawi, head of the Muslim College in London and chief spokesman for the Islamic Community in the UK, smiled at us across the conference room, then delivered a speech spiced with an English sense of humour. He skirted a controversial subject with biting irony: 'We are a big delegation from the UK,' he announced. 'An

invasion! Like Iraq!'. Embarrassed laughter rippled round the conference hall. Within just a few years, both Mufti Jusufspahic and Zaki Badawi would be dead.

Ben Bella, elderly, fit and charismatic, sat in pride of place behind Dr Sherif. Over thirty years earlier he had led the Algerian revolution which drove the French from their last colony in North Africa. The savagery of this struggle, one of the most fiercely fought conflicts of the 20th century after the Second World War, traumatized a generation of Algerian and French people. The issues of liberation and violent struggle to achieve it became the subject of films and literature as well as influencing and affecting other freedom struggles across the world. They compelled Europe to reconsider its history of colonization in the aftermath of these conflicts. This led to the independence of countries it had been accustomed to dominate, and were now ruled by indigenous leaders. Many of these had been educated in Europe, so the influence of Western culture continued. Ambivalence towards this heritage complicated the development of new nation states trying to forge their particular ethnic identities. The consequences continue to harass Africa with perpetual civil wars, despotic governments, racial genocides, poverty, plagues, and suffering beyond the comprehension of those in the West who had once been in charge.

Despite the bloody violence of the struggle to liberate Algeria, Ben Bella, educated in Europe and who had fought alongside his French masters during the Second World War, now described himself as being an Islamist of a 'mild and peace-loving flavour.'

Colonel Gaddafi had been expected to appear at the Ta'aruf Conference but an influenza infection kept him away. Only the Philippine delegation was honoured with an invitation to his residence. They commented on the modest style of his apartments, and reported that he did look under the weather.

Gaddafi and Ben Bella would have made a formidable pair at the conference. As it was, Ben Bella on his own loomed over the delegates like an eagle over a flock of

sparrows. When he spoke, several African delegates banged their desks and insisted, one after the other, in expressing their pride at being in the same room as this celebrated freedom fighter, and to declare what an inspiration he was for all the peoples of Africa.

Delegates sat in a wide circle. In the middle of the room stood a massive table shaped like a horseshoe. Negotiating three grand floral displays camera crews moved from speaker to speaker, and above the chairman's desk at one end of the room a large screen showed the recorded film of the conference as it proceeded.

The first day began with a prayer and a verse from the Koran sung sweetly by a young imam. Various religious leaders then gave readings from the Bible and the Koran, along with introductory speeches. Some, like the Catholic delegate from the Vatican and the Anglican Bishop of Cairo, wore skull caps; others with turbans wrapped all round the face. Everyone received a leather attaché case filled with notepads, folders and translations. The program schedule allowed for free afternoons, not just as a respite from all the speeches, but to aid recovery from lavish lunches prepared by the dozen expert Moroccan chefs specially imported for the conference.

In the printed program, evening sessions were translated as 'nocturnal meetings', promising to be mysterious and perhaps indecent.

Interpreters, only two or three of them, tried valiantly to keep up with the Arab speakers: an unenviable task, as it is always more difficult to translate into a foreign language rather than one's own. By the end of the conference they were exhausted and after long silences, when they simply gave up translating, handed over with a sigh to one who had been resting, eventually fading away leaving just one voice carrying on like a cross-Channel swimmer, regardless of the difficulties.

Each morning the delegates were ferried by speeding coaches from the hotel to the conference centre, preceded by a hooting escort car packed with young men. They

thrust their bodies through open windows and gesticulated aggressively at any traffic in the way or coming too close. Hapless drivers cruising along, minding their own business, suddenly found themselves being yelled at and fists banging on the side of their vehicles. The job of being an escort rider was the most sought after by young men in Tripoli. No other employment in this otherwise sedate city offered such unlimited opportunity for sanctioned unfettered road rage and harassment of other drivers.

At the extreme end of the conference guest list Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam in the United States, had sent a deputy. Though not dressed in the intimidating style of Farrakhan's militant armed followers, who looked like nightclub bouncers in their black suits and shades, the deputy nevertheless spoke unreassuringly about the oppression of Muslims in America since September 9th 2001.

The most alarming delegate happened to be an Englishman who introduced himself to us on the first day at lunch as a born-again Christian. Before the first course had been served he announced apropos of nothing that he refused, on religious principle, 'to share bread with gays'. It was not clear what qualified him to be present at this Ta'aruf conference, but an English Muslim journal had sent him to report on the conference. Speaking in a broad cockney accent he whipped up frenzy among the delegates by reminding them of the suffering of Palestine. At one point he flung his arms wide and shouted that he could foresee the day when Palestine would take over the State of Israel. Several delegates banged their desks in approval, but most sat stony-faced at this outburst which contradicted Ta'aruf, the theme of the conference. Some speakers even rose to voice their disagreement. Later in the conference, this delegate talked about colonial concentration camps in North Africa, proposing a new use for them. He avoided being specific about who should be incarcerated there. When he claimed that Christians, Jews and Muslims could not live harmoniously

anywhere in the Middle East, the chairman of the conference put the Englishman in his place and reminded everyone of the long tradition of collaboration at every level of society in most of the region. Zaki Badawi winked at us as we glanced across the floor in alarm. We feared that the Englishman's outbursts would jeopardize our position there. It reminded me of a number of embarrassing and destructive encounters during travels in the past when, having painstakingly won the respect and friendship of people in foreign places, such an Englishman, or a group of them, turned up: loudmouthed, insensitive, and careless. By association I lost the respect and friendship I had spent months earning. As the conference proceeded, the man grew noisier, and took to dressing in a djellaba and Palestinian headscarf, trying to look like Arafat. Uncomfortable in the robe he had just bought in the medina he bustled about the conference hall and dining room perpetually adjusting the tight sleeves and unruly scarf. He looked like Mother Hubbard. Most of the delegates turned their backs on him but students from the World Islamic Call Society College who were helping backstage at the conference, and happened to be sitting at a neighbouring dining table, dropped their forks to stare at him fixedly for minutes on end.

He proudly announced to Zaki Badawi that several women were admiring his clothes and had even propositioned him on the way to the medina. 'It's not your dress they liked,' Zaki Badawi remarked drily. 'It was your passport.'

The chief delegate from Italy, and leader of the Italian Islamic Community, cut a dash at the conference with his athletic physique and aquiline features. Alfonzo von Pallavicini belonged to an aristocratic Catholic family which converted to Islam after the Second World War. Though dressed modestly, his manner was flamboyant: eyes rolling, flinging his arms around as he spoke and interrupting the proceedings with constant appeals not to forget God. On one occasion he engaged in a public dispute with Zaki Badawi about church and mosque attendances. The other delegates

expressed impatience whenever he spoke. They resented lectures about their religious practises from a recent convert they did not consider to be one of them.

Cemal Usak, who had welcomed us so warmly in Istanbul, turned out to be one of the surprises at the conference. He emerged from a crowd of Turkish delegates during a break, when they gathered round long tables spread with pots of coffee, tea and plates piled with dates, almonds, and biscuits. We did not recognize him at first because of the unfamiliar surroundings, but on catching sight of us he quickly came up with a friendly smile and reproached us for having lost touch with him. We spent several hours discussing the Ferhadija project and planning meetings in Ankara and Istanbul. Cemal did not believe that the religious elements in our work had made the businessmen Alper Utku and Haluk Turkmen lose interest. They had recently informed us by email that they were not supporting our project any more. In Cemal's opinion their withdrawal might have more to do with business rivalries between Libya and Turkey.

We met the Turkish delegation during a concert by a massed choir chanting vigorous folk music at a welcome banquet on the first night of the conference. Our unexplained problems with Alper and Haluk had prevented us fulfilling our bargain with Dr Cerić to build bridges between Turkey and the Bosnian Islamic community. A burly Turkish MP with an imposing long-whiskered moustache dominated the conversation that evening. He talked about organizing the business people in Turkey to giving generously to our project. 'Never beg!' he advised. He then commanded Cemal Usak to help us. Cemal began to shrink: 'You are laying so much on my poor shoulders!' he sighed weakly, to which the MP, looking ever more burly, responded with a loud 'Harrumph!' We then made arrangements to visit Istanbul again to meet ministers in Ankara and more business leaders in Istanbul.

The important meetings happened during the breaks, as always at this kind of conference, and often at the same time as the speeches but in other rooms. At the first banquet the delegates had to run the gauntlet of enthusiastic students from the World Islamic Call Society College. They waved flags of the different nationalities, and chanted appropriate anthems, including God Save the Queen, though with the boisterous air of sending them up. As soon as the delegates had entered the dining room the students rapidly disposed of the flags, and joined the crowd of guests feasting at tables, laid with a lush array of exotic salads, roast chicken, lamb, and baked fish, followed by a variety of cakes and fruit. Everyone from the most important delegates to the lowest functionaries, students and workers, sat together. An electrician who had installed the sound and lighting in the conference room and a student from The Gambia, joined our table. The student wearing a white robe talked animatedly. He and others complained about the restrictive regime at the college but were also indebted to the World Islamic Call Society for their education.

The Moroccan chefs continued to excel, proving they could outdo themselves, right up to the final supper. Nut confectionary, sticky cakes and dates preceded a different soup, followed by a fish course garnished with a variety of salads, then a meat course served on rice which on the second evening consisted of whole spit-roasted lambs, a large flock having been slaughtered for the occasion. Cream cakes and fruit salads including melons stuffed with berries rounded off the feast, along with coffee and herbal teas. Most of the guests at some stage of the conference suffered indigestion and had to learn quickly how to negotiate the lavish spreads. But the expertise of the chefs made it hard to just pick and taste rather than gorge. No one made mention of these culinary artists, so when Donald stood up on the last day to acknowledge and pay tribute to the quality of the behind-the-scenes activity, the normally poker-faced Dr Sherif beamed with delight.

For all the pleasant socializing, a painful issue made itself evident from the first speeches and continued unabated but unexamined to the final day. A sense of despair pervaded the conference: recognition of weakness in the face of United States hegemony in the world. Americans were invading Middle Eastern countries, first Afghanistan then Iraq, backing Israel over the intractable issue of Palestinians while voicing constant suspicion about Muslims, and talking openly about a new crusade. The giant in the forest had been disturbed in slumber and went on the rampage, except this giant had never been asleep. Every corner of the globe felt its influence, and now it exerted authority with crushing military might.

Studying the faces of the mullahs from Iran, who glared grimly on the front row throughout the conference, I reflected on moral authority in politics. The United States in its zeal to rid the world of terrorism continues to bomb and kill citizens with impunity. It regrets the deaths of children and women as ‘collateral damage’, making the victims sound inanimate, like parts of a machine. America ignores the rights of those it decides are terrorists: ‘bad’ people. The mullahs from Iran attending the Tripoli conference still enjoy absolute power. They condone and order violent repression with torture, murder and disappearances. They encourage stoning of adulterers, blinding of people who dare to look at advertisements, severing the hands of thieves, and crushing dissenters by killing them. Their unblinking black gaze indicate they witness all this first-hand, whereas for leaders in America and its allies, torture and killing take place out of sight, by remote control.

The evangelical Englishman, adjusting his Arafat headscarf, reduced the argument to its lowest common denominator by shouting at the conference: ‘You stop your Osama bin Ladens and we will stop Bush!’ This assumed a symmetry of guilt that ignored issues which had nothing to do with extremists but everything to do with power and

global influence, and how weaker nations try to hold on to their identity while being taken over by an alien culture.

Choosing the theme of Ta'aruf could itself be an admission of weakness: a plea to the bully in the playground to live and let live.

One after the other the delegates voiced their anxiety and confusion, never admitting weakness but expressing concern for mutual understanding. Sadness underscored all these contributions. When the delegates from the smaller African countries launched into long speeches of thanks to the World Islamic Call Society for help received, the undertow of despair sucked away any sense of pride or achievement, and several times their contributions were cut short in mid sentence.

Aware of the urgency of this issue Dr Sherif called us to a private meeting. We planned another conference to work out a strategy for Ta'aruf between the Muslim and non-Muslim world. This conference would take place in England in May 2004.

BLASTING THE HUMAN FLOWER

RETURN TO BOSNIA OCTOBER 2003

Nature – no!

Kings priests and statesmen

Blast the human flower.

Shelley

THE NUNS OF NOVA TOPOLA

The River Sava divides two countries between predominantly Catholic Croatia, now embedding itself in the European Union, and Bosnia, a country which on entry

straight away feels utterly different from the rest of the continent. The smooth smart motorway from Zagreb leads onto a slip road signposted to Banja Luka and after crossing the bridge over the river cars immediately find themselves trapped by articulated vehicles, tractors, and horse-drawn carts, on a road too narrow for overtaking.

We were now familiar with every inch of the road from Gradishka on the Bosnian side of the border to Banja Luka, having driven up and down these twenty or so miles many times over the last four years. For much of the way the two-lane road is lined by two-storey houses, each with its own garden, vine, hens scratching. An occasional kiosk sells whatever goods are available: sometimes mountains of bananas that may have dropped off the back of a lorry, or been purchased at a knock-down price. A surprising number of brashly lit gas stations and garages advertising car-cleaning and ‘vulcanizing’, far more than this sparsely populated countryside requires, indicate money laundering and other nefarious activity.

A large new welcome sign to Bosnia and Herzegovina at the border with place names written in Latin rather than Cyrillic script, and most strikingly the new mosque outside Gradishka signified softening of nationalist attitudes. Muslim presence was at least being acknowledged.

However, the catastrophe that decimated the Catholic community remained hidden. Along this unremarkable stretch of road some of the worst atrocities of the war took place. Soldiers of the Greater Serbia drove the Catholics out, killing the men who did not flee, raping the women, burning Catholic property, and destroying churches.

Half way to Banja Luka on the left hand side stands the church and convent of Nova Topola. Bishop Komarica told us the nuns’ story. Because they did not flee the Serb militia, they were assaulted, beaten and raped; some of them were killed, and the convent and church shelled. The priest was taken away and never heard of again.

After this destruction many of the surviving nuns went into hiding, but the head sister insisted on staying despite constant harassment. The locals, Serb, Muslim as well as Catholic, had always respected the convent, famous for its herbal medicines. The late-nineteenth century church was decorated in a restrained folk style with curling ribbons of colour along the white walls and painted wood-carvings across the ceiling. The muted colours of its stained glass contrasted with garish windows in more modern Catholic churches elsewhere in Bosnia. The militia did not destroy the building as totally as others in Bosnia. Perhaps the Serbs living nearby stopped them. However, the battering experienced by buildings and humans could be noted as soon as we entered the place and met the nuns.

Past atrocities can be sensed in places, without a person knowing their history. Vacationing in France one summer in the 1970s, I used to pass a crossroads and regularly felt an inexplicable dread grip me: a choking in my throat and difficulty in breathing. This bothered me so much that I asked about the location's history. Reluctantly some locals eventually told me what happened. A group of resistance fighters had been betrayed and ambushed there towards the end of the Second World War, and all of them killed. It seems the intensity of fear and horror experienced clings to a place: a terror so great that it cannot be dissolved so easily by time.

To my surprise I did not experience a similar dread at Auschwitz. That scene of mass execution and suffering seemed to me bereft of all sensation, a place abandoned by all spirits. No bird sang there. If anything, I felt rather the memory weight of those who had committed the crimes. The souls of their victims had long fled the place.

As we turned off the road at Nova Topola and entered a dark narrow avenue of tall trees, planted closely like a guard of honour, I suddenly experienced the same chill and internal stabbing as at that crossroads near Annecy: the expectation of something terrible about to happen. The nuns must have felt this as they heard the Serb soldiers

tramping up the drive, the scuffle of dry leaves, the crack of twigs, and the shelling of their church which stood at the end of this short avenue. Its slim tower rises steeply above the tree tops.

The convent consisted of a house across a courtyard from the church. Fields belonging to their farm stretched towards the banks of the River Vrbas.

An elderly nun greeted us with a smile, and we were immediately introduced to the chief sister, a much younger woman with a handsome face. The streaks of premature metallic grey in her black hair reflected the steel in her character that had enabled her to endure and survive. This woman's face said more about the war than any number of documentaries. The murderous actions of remorseless men in the grip of the obsessive need to destroy leave their mark more vividly on the features of those victims who survive than on senselessly mutilated and bloodied corpses.

A third sister welcomed us, older than her chief but younger than the elderly one. The three women represented various responses to the war. The elderly one smiled constantly, if nervously: determined to face the future positively, wanting to draw a veil over what her mind still could not grasp. She had fled when the assaults began and returned in more peaceful times. The middle one had also fled, and now behaved as though everything was back to normal, practically and methodically: making up the packets of tea, focusing determinedly on the present and on what needed to be done. The youngest sister, who had refused to flee and had withstood all assaults, now took charge of the convent. She focused her energies on repairing the buildings and the church. However positive and practical she needed to be, the pain and horror she experienced remained an ineradicable part of her life and work. For all her decisive movements, the resolute way she swept the courtyard and said her prayers and offices, what she had endured did not leave her. It sustained her. She had suffered the worst

that human beings could inflict on each other, and this seemed to strengthen rather than to weaken her faith.

A similar, sweet-natured, pious, and resolute woman squares up to a psychopathic murderer in *The Night of the Hunter*, a film directed by Charles Laughton.

The film transplants the forests of Grimm's fairytales to the American mid-West during the Depression. Material and spiritual poverty forces people into survival mode, and dangerous roaming psychopaths replace witches. The film appears to be about the conflict between good and evil, but in the manner of the best fairytales is more ambiguous. Innocence is beset by ruthless cunning: children and grownups manipulated by people they not only have to trust but want to trust, because of the intense need for love in dark times. The murderer played by Robert Mitchum as implacable and ruthless, casts a shadow over the whole story. Yet in the final confrontation when the boy he has been pursuing for money hidden in a doll throws the notes like waste paper at him, the killer crumbles. His menace dissipated he suddenly reveals himself to be a pathetic person. Like the witch pushed into her own oven in *Hansel and Gretel*, he turns brittle and harmless.

In *The Night of the Hunter* it is the deceptively frail-looking but redoubtable Lillian Gish who becomes the source of stability and compassion in a world without justice or security, and where in a life and death struggle to survive it seems that only the most violent and cunning manage this by crushing the weak. She proves otherwise: her final words about the innocence and vulnerability of children have a particular resonance. 'They endure.' The casting of Lillian Gish was inspired. She had starred in a number of classic silent movies, epics by DW Griffiths and Viktor Sjöström, artists who were creating the language of cinema. They cast her mostly as a damsel in distress, battered by events, assaulted and terrorised. Griffiths hurls her onto an ice-

floe, which carries her down-river, and Sjöström imprisons her in a lonely shack in the middle of a desert, at the mercy of an abusive husband. In every case her triumphant physical and moral survival indicates a steely core. Neither the elements nor human cruelty can break her spirit. Her tiny slender form bent but never surrendered. She embodied the Chinese saying, repeated often by another director, Andrei Tarkovsky, whose films explore the human condition and also expanded the language of cinema, that the reed is stronger than the oak. In a storm the oak snaps, but the reed sways and is not broken. Burly strong-man Robert Mitchum in *The Night of the Hunter* discovers slightly built Lillian Gish to be a robust adversary. In their final nocturnal confrontation, Gish, unlike the nuns of Nova Topola, nurses a gun as she waits for the psychopath's assault on her house and children. But like the nuns in their hour of peril she sings a hymn. Mitchum, who is masquerading as a preacher, joins in. Both put their trust in the Lord. Mitchum does so to hoodwink the old lady, but she is not to be fooled and like a lioness protects the children in her care. It is a physical and mental battle which logically she should lose, but it is the children in her care who help defeat the marauder. She made a family for these lost souls. It is not only out of gratitude but in a spirit of determination to keep the family intact that they do what is necessary. Because of this they succeed in eliminating the danger.

The film's setting describes the desperate and bleak times that follow economic depression and war. People are forced to fend for themselves; charity is rare and criminals take advantage. Against this backdrop of self-interest and scrabbling for subsistence in a society without moral compass, a figure like Lillian Gish appears extraordinary, quixotic and even laughable. How can such an old-fashioned, elderly do-gooder type possibly create order in the middle of chaos? She doesn't stand a chance against a determined ruthless psychopath, does she? Yet she is the one who survives and the other does not. At the time the film came out few people wanted to

see or take it seriously, and Laughton never made another. Perhaps the way he told the story was too bleak and challenging for a post-war audience that wanted entertainment. It took several decades for people to not only acknowledge it as a classic but to realize the depth of insight and feeling beneath the surface of a nail-biting thriller. The film provides a timeless commentary on a world devastated by economic collapse and war.

In the nuns' house at Nova Topola we sat in a small guestroom round a table, and drank juice. Donald told them about parishes in the UK wanting to support the nuns, needing to know what they wanted to do, and how people could help. 'I am a messenger,' he said. We already knew about the cottage industry in herbal medicines, and there could be a lot of interest in this all over Europe.

The nuns told us their story.

The sisters used to work in Alexandrovac, a village a few miles down the road on the way to Banja Luka. The war stopped this work, but when fighting ended they decided to return at the earliest opportunity. Then they had to re-establish good relations with the local people. The convent by the church used to be a home for elderly nuns, so now the surviving sisters moved in and began to restore the damaged buildings. The region had been mainly Serbian Orthodox, even before the war, so the sisters wanted to be of help to everybody, as they had been before, not just to Catholics. The nuns used to keep the convent solvent by taking on jobs for the local community: sewing, nursing, and teaching music. During the war, the nuns were assaulted and raped, old and young ones, several times. Serb militias shelled and burnt Catholic churches and homes. The bishop tried to evacuate the nuns, but a few stayed on. The majority left. A number of those that remained died in the following years because they were elderly. Before the war the nuns ran a small farm as well as making medicinal herb

tea mixtures. The stables and sheds were burnt, so the farm work stopped. The priest was abducted from his parish home and never heard of again. A small number of local people did try to help and protect the nuns. Then those sisters who remained in the convent were taken away by soldiers, who arrived without warning. The nuns were not given time to wash or change their clothes. For seven years they could not come near the place. When people gradually began to return to their homes and properties, no one knew what to do with the destroyed buildings. The sisters thought: 'It is God's will to return. With God's help he will take care of us.'

'That is our story,' they said. 'We belong to the order of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. When we got the house back it was totally destroyed. We had no money, help or materials. Before the war one hundred nuns lived here, and now only eleven are left in the whole regions. The others fled. There should be a place for them to return to. Our leaders asked for God's guidance. Then providence came, some people gave money, and we managed to repair the place. Now we must live here. We need providence for the other house in Alexandrovac. We do not have enough space for drying and preparing herbs, so it is important to rebuild the house.'

The nuns used to cycle or drive into the mountains, particularly along the Dalmatian Coast where herbs could be found in specific areas. The nuns dried small quantities that had not been spoiled in transit. They presented us with several envelopes of the herbs, good for nervous conditions, calming people and helping them sleep. No surprise that these medicines were now more needed more than ever in this traumatized region of Bosnia. The nuns showed us a tiny blunt knife used to chop the stalks and leaves. We immediately purchased an electric herb cutting machine in Banja Luka for them, hoping it would alleviate their tasks.

Adnan confirmed the nuns' negative view of the future: 'Nationalism has been institutionalised, unwritten but practised. What can one do when people who waged

the war are still in charge of the country? Not even Muslims are returning here except to sell their properties.’

‘NOTHING IS HAPPENING’

Mournful faces of past muftis looked down from the walls of the Islamic Centre in Banja Luka where Mufti Camdzic waited for us. By his side stood a tall thin assistant looking shy and grave, whom we recognized as the imam who fainted at the Bajram festivities two years earlier. After the customary effusive welcome we plunged straight into our agenda, mainly good news, to forestall any attack from the mufti: criticism and punches that we had come to expect on every visit.

First we informed them that the Muslim Christian group in Leicester, planning to raise funds for the Ferhadija Mosque, would invite the Reis and Mufti Camdzic to visit the UK. Also the Grand Mosque in Paris wanted to give financial support, as did an Islamic organization in Kerpen, Germany. We still waited for a call from the Emir of Qatar, whilst bearing in mind the Reis’s statement that one euro was worth a thousand Arab dollars. We were also setting up a Ferhadija Trust registered charity in the UK to which contributions could be made. Tim Winter, a celebrated convert to Islam in the UK, had agreed to chair the trust. Again, hoping to prevent the mufti’s expected attack, we apologised again for the length of time these matters were taking.

We then invited the mufti to a presentation and consultation in Brussels which would be dedicated to the Ferhadija project. Three MEPs had proposed inviting every single MEP in the European Parliament to donate one hundred Euros to the rebuilding of the mosque. These sympathetic MEPs would also open doors for money from all over the European Union.

If the mufti had intended to attack us for not yet building his mosque, our news seemed to have taken the wind out of his sails. He listened meekly, then told us about

his problems with the Islamic community in Banja Luka, who were constantly complaining to him about nothing happening. We told him that we welcomed any opportunity to talk to the community and explain what was going on.

In response to our news about a Swedish proposal to help rebuild the mosque, the mufti mentioned visits from various international organizations which had expressed interest, including the Soros Foundation. This was a surprise, as up to now the Soros Foundation, for reasons we never understood, had expressed nothing but hostility to our project.

We invited the mufti to write for our annual newsletter which would appear in 2004, when we had gathered enough material from people invited to contribute ideas on the role of international NGOs in Bosnia, and how a small organization like the Soul of Europe could be of use. We proposed that the mufti accompany us to Paris in January to discuss the project with the Secretary General of the French Islamic Council, and talked about plans to incorporate a visitors and reconciliation centre as part of the Ferhadija project. These would help with fund-raising in Europe.

The meeting ended without an attack from the mufti.

CRISIS

Grim faces and long conversations in Bosnian without translation indicated tensions in the management of the civic forum. Slavica and Sanela seemed to be involved in a power struggle. Adnan needed to call on all his diplomatic skills to prevent a rift. Sanela was threatening to leave because she felt that decisions were being made without consultation. She had recently married. Extra work commitments, involving midnight meetings on other business, and time spent meeting with her husband who lived in Zenica, several hours drive away over mountains, meant that she had not been able to attend to Civic Forum matters as much as Slavica. Used to running

organizations on her own, Slavica sat stony-faced and impervious to criticism, while Sanela looked hurt, riled and disappointed. This all happened round the breakfast table at the Palas Hotel, where the normally unfriendly waiters now knew who we were and beamed. One, a Croat, had begun to give me basic lessons in Bosnian.

The subsequent crisis which led to the civic forum's collapse revealed two as yet unresolved issues: the underestimated fragility of democratic processes developing in countries emerging from generations of totalitarian rule. In Bosnia's case this was exacerbated by war, and the impatience of the international community demanding quick results along the lines of: 'Why can't these people be like the rest of Europe? OK, they had a war. They should put it behind them, get on with rebuilding their country; pull their socks up!' Meanwhile former war criminals, and those who supported them, governed the region. 'We have to work with these people; they aren't that bad,' said the internationals, and perpetuated the lie: 'Everybody here is equally guilty'. These attitudes impede progress by sidelining issues of justice. The trauma of the Bosnia conflict would take generations to heal. They reflect the inter-cultural tensions throughout Europe, specifically between Muslims and non-Muslims. The expectation of quick returns on investment of time and money means that concrete success, visible, tangible and material, matter more than the less quantifiable, deeper and ultimately more lasting improvements in the relations between people of all groups. Because representatives of the international community tend to exchange views only with each other and keep a distance from the local people, expectations are unrealistic, bearing no relationship to the situation on the ground.

We came up full front against this issue at a meeting with Fiona McWhillam and Svetlana Cenic over lunch at the Ambassadors Restaurant.

This took place after a productive Civic Forum meeting, at which Sanela and Slavica resolved differences, and everyone agreed unanimously that Adnan should continue as

a mediator and consultant to the forum. Everyone expressed a determination not to be sidelined by politicians, as happened with most NGOs. They aimed to make the civic forum indispensable to the life of Banja Luka. However, Slavica raised the issue about the dangers of being seen to be part of such a forum. She pointed out the total lack of response to the forum's proposal for public meetings around issues of quality of life for returnees, for instance. People were not used to meeting in public and sharing their views. They still felt scared of the government: a legacy of decades of totalitarian rule, capped by a vindictive war in which they expected to be killed for who they were. The church leaders had not responded to the forum's request for contacts, and the National Assembly refused permission for members of the forum to attend meetings, ignoring its request for time to present the forum's objectives. Public attendance at the National Assembly broke the local laws. Such denial of access, considered an inalienable right in all democratic countries, proved that the National Assembly was not a democratic process. Bosnian Serb politicians were always keen to inform us that our proposals went 'against the law', neglecting the fact that they governed a country where people and property had been destroyed on a scale not witnessed since the Second World War. Were mass murder and the pulverising of mosques and churches within legal limits?

We tried to encourage the forum by giving examples of local communities in the UK being galvanised. For instance, when it was learnt at a parish meeting that the council planned to demolish the St Helier Estate in South London, a meeting immediately organized a confrontation with the authorities. People learned they could affect policy. Their actions empowered them. This could be a way of operating for the civic forum.

For all the difficulties the forum faced, we had to bear in mind what made it unique in Banja Luka: a management board made up equally of Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim members. This fact alone proved that such a group could function in a city

created out of ethnic cleansing. Tensions were to be expected. The group's first task was to preserve its unique balance, and to continue to function organically, taking no note of differences, but seeing everyone as equal.

We left the forum members at the end of the discussion to meet Fiona McWhillam at the Ambassadors Restaurant. She made it clear over lunch that the Foreign Office had a different agenda. We arrived assuming that the next funding for the forum was assured. It had been promised a month ago and the money as usual came late. The delay always hampered our administration as we could never guarantee employment to our staff. We lost several key workers as a result, including Dejan Jovanovic and Simon Goodenough. Knowing that she was leaving Banja Luka for another posting, and would not meet us again there, we handed Fiona a large box of chocolates as thanks for her assistance. She took the box at first half-heartedly, then with a half-smile, because she knew what came next. 'I cannot release the money,' were her first words. She spoke them not with apology but with triumph, as though with relief that she could get us finally off her and the Foreign Office's back.

How could we hold the forum together without funds? The lunch proceeded to get worse as Fiona explained the Foreign Office agenda which came in the form of sharp criticism of our work. The young men running the department were disappointed with our 'delivery', and impatient to see results. They read her negative reports and concluded that British money had not been well spent. She complained that not enough profile had been given to British funding of this project through posters and banners across the town. She then criticized the project for being pro-Bosniak. Bosniak is a term favoured and used pejoratively by Serb nationalists, as in the recent Republika Srpska National Assembly declaration about what language the peoples of Bosnia spoke: Serbian, Croat and 'the language spoken by Bosniaks,' as though all were different, when in fact they were one and the same. Bosnian Serb politicians had

complained to Fiona about the Islamic bias of the forum, because it had a few Muslim members on the board. The nationalists pointed out its association with the Soul of Europe, well known for its plan to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque. Fiona insisted that the forum immediately separate itself from this project.

However the status of Muslims in Banja Luka, and the mosque project, were fundamental to the civic forum and our relationship with it. We were aware that giving too high a profile to the project threatened building of trust between the forum and the people of Banja Luka, a trust which needed to be developed from the grass roots. We had resisted advertising UK government involvement in the forum, knowing that a prominent public relations campaign linking the forum to foreign interests could jeopardise this stage of our work. People were still frightened to talk in public and were refusing to fill out questionnaires. They needed to be reassured by locals, not by internationals, who constantly underestimated the perils of speaking outspokenly in a country governed by extreme Bosnian Serb nationalists. The Ferhadija Mosque was a high priority project and could not be detached from our work with the civic forum. We tried to assure Fiona that we were developing other projects at the same time: educational, political and ecological. She remained unconvinced.

‘Not enough people know what the forum is doing,’ she complained. ‘The perception by politicians and other NGOs is that it is a Bosniak project.’ To our minds this counted as a success, to be happening in a place that had been so successfully cleansed of its Muslim population. Fiona persisted in her attack: ‘It is a civic forum, not just for one community. It has to be more multi-cultural.’

We wanted to remind her of the equal consistency of the management board. She had made up her mind and was determined to stop our work.

‘I want a list of high profile activities in the next months,’ Fiona demanded, smoothing long blonde tresses behind her ears, ‘including a publicity stunt and special presentations at the university. Slavica and Sanela are only part time, but we need a full-time director.’ Fiona meant someone other than Adnan, who she considered represented Muslims only, and was not even from Banja Luka but Sarajevo.

These demands raised several issues threatening the stability of any forum, which requires specific qualities from its members. A leader can not be imposed but must come from the ranks of the forum, appointed by the members themselves. So far Slavica and Sanela, a Serb and a Muslim, were capable of running it. Eventually such a full time director could be chosen, but that would take time. Meanwhile the members worked well together. Imposing an outsider could again jeopardise the delicate balance of the forum, which is why we wanted Adnan to take this role, if only temporarily, because he had training from the Soul of Europe. He knew how to liaise, and was trusted and liked by all the members.

Fiona noted our discomfort, and, like a teacher seeing submission in the eyes of punished pupils, tried to be conciliatory, saying the forum could make use of the embassy facilities, which would basically help with the advertising campaign. She came out with familiar jargon: sustainability issues and bullet points to be dealt with. However, since she had already decided to stop funding us in the next two months, this all seemed pointless. Besides which, the embassy office in Banja Luka, unlike in the days of Roy Wilson, could no longer be easily reached by phone or mail. It never responded to the forum members, when they wanted to reach her, and even our emails and phone calls regularly received a prompt reply saying no one would be around for the next days.

Trying to make sense of our situation, we found ourselves agreeing against our better judgment that the embassy office should choose someone to liaise with the forum and

provide support, but only at a specified time, like a surgery hour. Slavica and Sanela should meet Fiona and provide a written plan, but she insisted they be more aggressive in the forum's public relations, and that they also liaise regularly with the rest of the international community. Her insistence indicated her complete misunderstanding of how Civic forums operate. At this vulnerable stage of its development it could not afford to be PR aggressive or be seen to be under the influence let alone control of foreign countries.

Fiona intended her criticism to be a wake-up call to a forum she considered flawed in its make-up. In fact it shook the forum's confidence, discouraged the members who were still trying to decide on a way of operating and who were not ready for a high profile. Not used to dealing with these kinds of demands, the group almost fell apart immediately, and only our constant intervention and encouragement kept Slavica and Sanela from leaving.

Svetlana arrived in the middle of our meeting with Fiona and delivered another broadside. Svetlana reported a rumour that Adnan had made an attack on Bishop Jefrem and the Orthodox Church in Graz, where we had sent him to speak at an inter-religious conference. Adnan's speech described the Soul of Europe's objectives, saying we worked equally with all religious communities, describing our projects with the Catholics, Orthodox as well as Muslims. The fact that a Muslim from Sarajevo mentioned Bishop Jefrem's name had alarmed an Orthodox priest attending the same conference, and he reported back, leading people to assume that a Muslim could only be interested in slandering an Orthodox bishop. Svetlana should have known better, but her attack on us seemed more to do with putting us on our guard, to remind us that we too were foreigners and could not be guaranteed her future support. Receiving wind of this complaint, Adnan had already advised us to put the blame on him, even

though his speech would prove his innocence. We assured Svetlana he had been chastised but the damage was done.

Fiona's reaction shocked us. Without waiting for evidence she seized on Svetlana's accusation, taking it as proof of Adnan's guilt, demanded we sack him from the Soul of Europe, and that he be immediately removed from the forum's activities. She could not disguise her dislike of Adnan, the Muslim interloper from Sarajevo. Meanwhile she treated Svetlana, chief economic advisor to the president, with exaggerated respect, perpetually nodding in agreement. Svetlana missed Roy Wilson and clearly had no respect for Fiona. The more Fiona simpered the more contemptuously Svetlana ignored her. She spoke to Donald as though no one else was present, describing the economy of the Republika Srpska being in free fall. She talked about bankruptcies, which allowed businesses to stagnate so they lost value. She then offered to come to our planned presentation in Brussels to represent Bosnian Serb nationalists prepared to speak in defence of the Ferhadija Project. She at least understood the nature of our work, the links between the forum and the mosque, while making it clear she did this not to support us, but for the sake of her country. We knew where we stood with Svetlana, who throughout our years in Bosnia was the only politician and person of influence who kept in constant touch, replying to every email. She was pragmatic about the purpose of our work. Whatever her personal feelings, she knew, unlike Fiona, that our work with the forum could only help the Republika Srpska, educate a new generation in democratic principles and persuade her party to adopt international codes of practice. She knew that Donald had access to international people who could be useful to her. Coming to Brussels provided her with an opportunity to prove to the international community that Bosnian Serb nationalists supported the rebuilding of the mosque and could be trusted.

It happened that we arrived in Banja Luka on the day of the former President of Bosnia Alija Izetbegovic's funeral. Bosnian Serbs considered him to be as culpable of war crimes as their own leaders. Sulejman Tihic, a friend of the Soul of Europe, had taken over the presidency, and used the funeral as an opportunity to attack the Republika Srpska for, among other things, not giving up war criminals to the Hague Tribunal. He declared that many of them still governed the country.

'That was not helpful, playing games, each side being more nationalist than the other,' Svetlana commented. Fiona agreed with vigorous nodding. Svetlana then left the table, barely acknowledging me, brushing Fiona aside, and only embracing Donald warmly before assuming her usual grim expression, black hair radiating in a mass around her pale features, then strode off to deal with the president.

Unhappy at this brush-off, Fiona sat down again, nervously smoothing her hair, and repeated her demands about the civic forum. The members had to present themselves publicly and make their role in Banja Luka understood. Once they had satisfied her she might re-consider authorizing funds. Not only might the civic forum fold up for lack of money, it needed to survive while Fiona made her mind up. She then announced that her next posting when she left Banja Luka would be to supervise funding projects at the Foreign Office. After momentarily panicking about losing her purse, she shook our hands, picked up the box of chocolates, and then warned us that our paths might cross again if we insisted on applying for further funding from that quarter.

Apart from her ignorance I resented this young and inexperienced woman's humiliation of Donald, treating him like a schoolboy despite his skills and proven record. She represented a radical change in the nature of embassy activity. Autonomous decisions and interventions by respected, educated, and trusted ambassadors and heads of office, such as Graham Hand, Ian Cliff, Roy Wilson and

others we had met and known were now replaced with bureaucrats from the Foreign Office. These followed guidelines specified by Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries. Funds could no longer be distributed as in the past for project managers to use as they thought fit. Every penny had to be accounted for, with managers being constantly reminded they were using tax-payers money. Fiona McWhillam fitted into this new regime. But her assumed role, as an arm-piece of a ministry she claimed to have no influence over, could not hide the fact that her reports on our projects did contribute to its decision regarding our work, and coloured attitudes towards us. Ambassadors and heads of office who succeeded her had read her reports, and shared her attitudes. The next one we met would tell us forcefully at our first meeting: 'We are all agreed that your work in Banja Luka has been a failure.'

Fiona departed and we never saw her again. 'Working here has lost its savour,' Donald said softly.

We did not know if or when funding might continue. This undermined the morale of the civic forum. For the time being, Slavica and Sanela accepted Fiona's demands without question or protest, as they were accustomed to do in the days of communism, and now under the internationals, who held the purse-strings and the key to their employment and survival. They began to plan a calendar of events including public forums on the themes of St Nicholas, St Sava and Bajram: the important Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim religious feasts. They began to investigate public relations proposals and agreed to liaise with a secretary at the British Embassy office in Banja Luka at the limited regular times offered by Fiona.

Sanela reminded us of the main issue: 'Trust is vital. Only a good result will produce that. And a good result takes time.'

FOXES, CHICKENS AND A HUNDRED COWS

Bishop Komarica regularly told us: ‘While the fox is in the hencoop, how can we expect the chickens to return.’ Politics and a flat-lined economy discouraged Catholics returning to their former homes. Not even the Pope’s visit could solve that problem. International officials in Bosnia were so fed up with the bishop’s complaining about this vicious circle that they closed their ears to his harangues. The few Catholics trying to survive in these conditions watched Muslim communities returning. Unlike Christian Croat and Serb refugees, Bosnian Muslims did not feel welcome or at home anywhere else in Europe. These Muslims were vigorously and determinedly rebuilding villages and their own local economies. We witnessed this resurgence in towns like Kozarac near Prijedor where refugees who had found good jobs abroad contributed funds to returnees for this purpose. Catholics had always been a minority in this part of Bosnia. Few people paid attention to their plight because many Catholics who had fled to neighbouring Croatia were being supported, prospered and did not want to return. For Bishop Komarica this had become a moral issue of justice, an open sore in the European community. His words discomfited because he refused to sweep the past under the carpet. He demanded justice for his persecuted people. This reminded everyone of the uncomfortable fact that though the war had been brought to an end, the issues of ethnic cleansing and unjust political solutions cobbled together to end the violence left a large unresolved question mark about guilt and restitution, not just over Bosnia but all over Europe,. Officials sighed whenever the bishop spoke, and wished he would shut up and go away. The problems of returnees, political instability of a country still ruled by people who had committed crimes in the war, endemic corruption, and economic collapse, all pushed issues around justice and morality off the agenda. Even if the country were to prosper, the

question remained: how could Europe consider itself a civilized humane place, with soul, if it turned its back on victims and their suffering?

Donald contacted leaders and people of influence in the Catholic constituency of the UK to establish a support network for the bishop: a group of people to share his frustrations and ideas.

He started with Raymond Hylton, a Catholic peer and both were taken by Bishop Komarica on the horror tour of his diocese, lighting candles at graves of murdered priests in the middle of rainstorms, stepping over the ruins of shelled churches, and tramping around flattened, burnt-out, weed-strewn, deserted villages.

Donald proposed a follow-up conference to the visits by Pope John Paul II and Lord Hylton. The bishop's main supporters from across Europe should be invited to identify problems, and then work out a program for helping the diocese. The fact that the bishop's words constantly fell on deaf ears, despite him being showered with honours and awards for his humanitarian acts and principles, meant that he needed advocates to speak for him: people who would get the attention of those people who could make a difference. By working together rather than individually, these supporters would create a critical mass that could bring positive changes to Bishop Komarica's diocese. My own worries about the bishop's health and stamina proved correct. In the following years he suffered deep depression and heart problems. Eventually in 2012, to the dismay of many Bosnian Catholics, he would humbly accept an award from the president of the Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik. No one understood why he allowed himself to be humiliated but we understood his thinking. He wanted to protect his Catholic constituency at whatever cost, even if that meant accepting recognition from someone who represented a group that had wanted to destroy it and him.

For now the bishop seemed in good spirits and health. He had seized on Donald's proposal and invited us to a conference in Banja Luka, attended by supporters from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.

The bishop opened the proceedings with a prayer commanding us to 'love one another'. I thought of Fiona and how hard it was for me to love her. He talked about a European soul, a baffling concept for most of the continent which has little interest in religion. 'People are not strong enough to resist destructive force,' the bishop concluded, speaking from experience, but added: 'Human love, caritas, can resist.'

Donald's proposals for establishing models of in-service training and raising morale among the clergy went over the heads of most of the people at the conference, which was predominantly a Caritas event. Most of the talk centred on charity work in Bosnia rather than identifying and understanding the underlying problems and issues needing urgent attention. The Dutch, German and Italian representatives had all given generously of their time and resources to the bishop's diocese. They did not consider us to be in their league because we had not given sufficient funds or material assistance. They behaved politely but none understood the bishop's fundamental problems, that however much they helped the Catholic community in Bosnia the political and economic situation remained the same.

The Italian contingent concerned itself with building cattle sheds, purchasing cows, tractors, and other immediate material necessities. The Dutch wanted to build more churches. They provided essential medicines for the hospital. Bosnia remained a high priority in their charity work.

However Coen van Loon, a lively Dutch priest, observed that material help to Bosnia was in decline as other parts of the suffering world made demands on people, and he backed our proposal for ensuring regular ongoing support for parishes. He promised to persuade the Bishop of Harlem to create links with six new churches in the diocese.

Cor Mulder, a modest elderly man with white hair sticking up in unruly wisps, spoke of his fifty visits to Banja Luka since the outbreak of the war. He always came with clothing and medicine at considerable risk to himself and his wife, sleeping in the car to save money. He had been buying and collecting medicines ever since, and established a foundation to collect funds.

These generous people spoke directly and simply. What right had we to sit in their company, not having brought any cows or made any material difference to the lives of people in Bishop Komarica's diocese?

The group from Italy shamed us especially as they described links between Mantua and the remote village of Glamoc in the mountains on the way to the Dalmatian Coast. 'We've come more to receive than to give,' they said movingly, speaking about 'a testimony of suffering'. 'We are also facing challenges in Mantua,' they continued. 'We constructed a pastoral centre in Glamoc, where people meet and provide food for all the people as well as agricultural support, farms and cows. We also sponsor children, and create links with families in Mantua.'

Father Tomaselli, a priest from Trento, described links between his parish and Banja Luka going back many decades. He remembered visiting Banja Luka after the war and finding a depressed bishop despairing of Western support. 'Relationships are important,' Father Tomaselli declared. 'We organize summer camps in the Italian mountains, work camps in Banja Luka, annual cultural meetings, responding to people's needs and making present the Kingdom of God.'

Growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s I remembered being sent on similar summer work-camps. My parents, socially aware and politically radical, signed up to these kind of projects, organized, not so much by the Anglicans but by Protestants and Catholics on mainland Europe, particularly by the French, Italians and Germans. I was

sent with groups of teenagers to build playgrounds in inner city areas. While joining in the spirit of invigorating work, and benefitting from the lavish welcome of grateful local communities who took us young people to their hearts and fed us superlatively well, I observed the group leaders in action. The zeal of these trainee priests for doing good and working for social change did not conceal personal problems and religious doubts, expressed in tormented conversations that perplexed me. Here were young men making a commitment for the rest of their lives, and wrestling with the consequences of that early decision. When I read Dostoevsky, especially *The Brothers Karamazov* in which the main character is just such a trainee priest, and watch films like *From the Diary of a Country Priest* and *Viridiana*, I begin to understand the nature of these inner conflicts: sexual, intellectual and spiritual. I then look back on these group leaders with respect and admiration. Here at the conference in Banja Luka, these young men had grown into experienced and dedicated elderly priests.

Caritas charity spokesmen from Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia took over most of the morning session in describing their work. They repeated the grim recent history of the diocese, the decimation of the Catholic community, the destroyed churches, hundreds killed, including seven priests and a nun, the chaos of war's aftermath, crowds begging, lorry-loads of aid not being allowed through, Serb controlled checkpoints, etc., Catholic and Muslim aid agencies would help each other to bring essential goods, pretending to be the other depending on which part of the border they were entering.

After several hours being shown slides of sheds and empty fields we spent the afternoon driving around the flatlands of northern Bosnian looking at these same sheds and empty fields. Hunched against sharply cold, blustery winds and drenching

sleet, we trudged for most of the afternoon around derelict farms and realized there would be no time to discuss the issues that concerned the bishop.

Bishop Komarica gave a speech before supper, first of all praising the work of the clinic operating out of his former home, then announcing that the diocese had overreached itself with new construction projects and fallen into debt. He repeated the familiar story of chaos and incompetence, corrupt legal systems, and access to politicians being constantly blocked.

Donald seized this opportunity to talk about strategy. ‘People are your best resource,’ he said, grasping after glimmers of hope and trying to be encouraging. ‘They will inspire a cynical and soul-less Europe. We must develop a strategy.’

At this point the conference diverged sharply, one group pushing for material assistance only, and Coen van Loon, us and the bishop, wanting to deal with political and social issues.

The bishop described his people becoming victims without having done any wrong, punished beyond justice. He insisted on their being, as he put it, ‘present’: an acknowledgment of the political and social reality for returnees not being welcome, not able to find homes or work. ‘We need to keep the light burning for them,’ he said.

The Italians suggested increasing material support, sending more cows, building larger stables and bringing equipment. We should continue providing this aid until the local authorities took responsibility.

The conference ended without a united approach. However the bishop knew how to lift peoples’ spirits as we had witnessed on previous visits. After supper he insisted on opening bottles of wine presented to him by the Pope when he arrived in Banja Luka, and persuaded everybody to sing: each country contributing. The Italians roared one popular song after the other. Long unused to this tradition of communal activity, which last I remembered from my childhood half a century ago, we searched

pathetically in our minds for something, anything, to sing, and desperately launched into *Amazing Grace*. We promptly forgot the words, but since everyone else knew them, they took over enthusiastically, singing louder than ever. At Margit's turn she became shy like us, and was silent. Arriving a day late, she had missed most of the conference but, angel-like, prepared and proudly served up a delicious meat casserole. The bishop sang a German folksong. Only then did Margit hesitantly join in.

Afterwards the bishop presented Cor Mulder with a large parcel full of sweets in gratitude for the man's courageous and determined help over the years. Everyone knew that the frail elderly man had been diagnosed with cancer and did not have long to live. Drunk with wine and singing, we all became emotional, and the Italians began to take a liking to us. Cor Mulder, who for years had, in his unassuming way, done so much for the bishop stood up, and moved us by declaring that he had no choice in the matter. Once he learned of the plight of the Banja Luka Catholics he saw the rest of his life mapped out for him. He converted his home into a warehouse, made collections and deliveries, driving as often as he could from the Netherlands to Bosnia and back.

Bringing me sharply down to earth, Margit nudged me in the ribs and said: 'High time you did something for the Catholics, not always for the Muslims!'

Doubtful about the purpose of this conference and our usefulness in general, she added facetiously: 'Have you done anything at all yet? Nothing – huh?'

She then blushed, realizing she may have gone too far. Agreeing with her I told her we could not even begin to compete with the extent of her good works, remembering her claim to have raised over five million marks for the bishop. In response to my attempts at explaining how we were trying to be advocates for the bishop, to be good friends, she backtracked touchingly and said softly: 'That is very important indeed, of course. The bishop needs friends.'

Nevertheless we left the conference feeling that we should have brought at least a hundred cows with us.

BARBARIANS – A KIND OF SOLUTION

THE BRUSSELS PRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION

10th-12th December 2003

We have the capacity to live together, to rebuild, just as we have the capacity to destroy. Ulla Sandbaek MEP

My dream our future. Dorthe Kallasch-Raunig, Duisburg, Germany

This gathering in Brussels had one over-riding purpose for the World Islamic Call Society, which paid for it: to establish formal political and economic links between Europe and Libya. The Society approved our plan to establish a network across Europe which would not only support the ‘flagship’ project for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque in Bosnia but also create opportunities for multi-ethnic and inter-faith groups to share experiences, learn from each other, and encourage similar community activities everywhere in the continent.

Cafavy’s celebrated poem *The Barbarians* raises the question as to who or what is ‘barbarian’, the ‘alien’, the ‘other’ and suggests the possibility that the concept no longer exists, or even matters. Perhaps the so-called ‘barbarians’ are already embedded within society, only we have yet to come to terms with this fact of life. Are they even barbarians? Are we? The poem suggests fear of the ‘other’ but tinged with fascination and longing, hence the disappointment in the final lines: this ‘other’ may not even exist.

When the Bosnians arrived at Brussels and began to prepare for the event, it did feel like a barbarian invasion, something unruly and unkempt, ruffling the even polished surface of the European Parliament.

The event consisted of two parts, a presentation and a consultation. The presentation, which took place on the 10th December 2003, focused on the project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka as a pan-European joint collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims. Sixty four people, including representatives from inter-faith groups from all over Europe, a few invited MEPs and guests, attended the presentation. This took the form of introductory speeches, a short film, an exhibition of photographs, and a specially commissioned large-scale painting depicting the diversity of faiths in Bosnia. The MEPs and guests gave their response in the evening. The next day, group representatives gathered for a consultation. After sharing experiences from each of their projects and constituencies they began the process of creating a network of similar groups to support, encourage each other, and to take their work further. Out of several proposals one in particular inspired the majority of representatives. This focused on the event being a springboard for future meetings to be held in different countries across Europe with the purpose of raising public awareness of the need for dialogue and to establish joint projects to improve relations between different faith groups, specifically Muslim and non-Muslim.

THE PRESENTATION

Donald followed our host, the English MEP, Christopher Beazley's welcome speech with a talk about the significance of this moment in European history, when non-Muslims needed to listen and understand their Muslim neighbours, and so create signs of hope in positive collaboration and interaction which could provide a counter-balance to the voices and actions of extremists on both sides.

Dr Sherif, General of the World Islam Call Society based in Libya, announced his support for our work, and hoped that this marked the beginning of an ongoing process of inter-faith practical projects.

Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, spoke at length about the need for such initiatives and gave his blessing to the presentation and consultation.

Sarajevo artist Daria Nikolic unveiled her large-scale painting, which depicted the different religions in Bosnia, putting at its centre a Bogumil image, the form of early Christianity specific to the country, and filled the rest of the canvas with symbols of Judaism, Islam and the two mainstream branches of Christianity, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Adnan showed a short documentary film made specially for the presentation: a history of Bosnia from the Middle Ages to the present day. It showed how despite invasions and conflicts, culminating in the war of ethnic cleansing at the end of the 20th century, the country had always been a mixed nation of different faiths and cultures. These learned on the whole to co-exist peacefully. Communities nurtured and celebrated their diversity in spite of centuries of invasion and foreign interference, and even the recent, what he called, 'nationalistic' war.

Another MEP, General Philippe Morillon, picked up on the images that opened and closed the film in his response, observing how Bosnia was an inspiration to the rest of Europe, showing how a country can be enriched by the diversity of its different cultures. MEP Ulla Sandbaek spoke of the capacity of people to build as well as destroy. MEP Doris Pack emphasised the need for justice without which there could be no reconciliation.

Next day Peter Ashby, who had so expertly facilitated the Coventry Consultation in September 2001, performed the same function for us here in Brussels. As at Coventry, he knew how to make the best use of the few hours the groups spent together, rapidly

initiating discussion and decision making. Having invited all the groups to present their ideas for joint collaborative activities, based on their own experiences and projects, two proposals emerged:

The first centred on the completion of the project to reconstruct the Ferhadija Mosque. Part of the celebration surrounding the opening of the mosque would be a major inter-faith cultural event in Banja Luka.

The second objective came from the Spanish group proposing an annual festival in a nominated European City of Faith, which would celebrate inter-faith collaboration working on current issues, social, political and cultural.

Two themes kept repeating. The first focused on educating Europe about its Islamic heritage and to gain better understanding of Muslim communities now living in the continent. The second focused on creating opportunities for Muslims and Christians to meet and work on matters of common concern.

Everyone agreed that Europe needed tangible signs of hope. All communities should be seen working together, as with the Ferhadija Mosque project, to prove the possibility of a mutually collaborative future together.

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THE MANDARINS OF BRUSSELS

Before the presentation started, we met senior officials in the European Commission: those who held the purse strings. After filling large complicated forms taking pains not to make any mistakes, the smallest one meaning the application would be immediately rejected, and paying an expert over £2000 to fashion it into an acceptable document, professional and impossible to fault, we then waited a year, phoning persistently, until someone informed us that we had been turned down. Based on Charles Handy's *The Elephant and the Flea*, Donald wrote a critique of the process

we endured, and sent it to Brussels. The mandarins reluctantly agreed to meet us so as to put an end to the phone calls and correspondence and silence us.

The massive application, like a thick encyclopaedia, had to be delivered in quadruple by a certain date, and Donald travelled to Brussels at his own expense specially to make sure all the copies were safely delivered. After a year's silence, Donald made enquiries and people put the phone down on him in horror because they were forbidden to have contact with anyone applying for funds. The persistence of corruption scandals in the European Commission explained this exaggerated response. At best, organizations with sufficient funds and expert lawyers could put pressure on the European Commission to secure funding. At worst, the commissioners themselves loosened the treasury purse-strings for friends and colleagues. Small organizations stood no chance. Eventually a secretary who knew about our application put us on hold for several more weeks before telling us we had failed.

Donald made the point in his paper that when it comes to financing our kind of mediation projects, the rules that work for construction and material projects can not apply. The different realities of our mediation processes demand different ways of management and control. The paper calls for a new philosophy for funding: *such a philosophy will draw on ancient and well tried understandings of patronage and philanthropy. Such a philosophy is impatient with the mechanistic view of reality, which describes men and women in purely functional terms as beneficiaries. A new philosophy recognizes the need to foster compassion, trust and solidarity. It honours the primacy of the imagination as that capacity to see the world as it could be. Projects can be judged and measured but not by the categories of the market.*

Donald ends his paper by acknowledging: *funding agencies will understand there is no quick fix. They have to be prepared for the long haul.*

His paper must have intrigued the mandarins, and they permitted a meeting in Brussels.

Their offices were tucked away in an unostentatious building. Nicolas Granville, the mandarin to whom Donald had been sending his incendiary critiques, did not appear, because of a cold, but we were lucky to meet Christopher Clark, one of the chief mandarins. He too was coming down with a cold. The woman who had been at the receiving end of many angry phone calls from Donald joined the meeting. She looked nervous.

Fine modern tapestries depicting elephants and birds, colourful posters of exhibitions including Monet decorated a compact office cluttered with applications, reference books, and files. Being a high floor of the building the office window looked out on to a panoramic view of the city.

The meeting was a stand-off. Their attitude said: 'Tough luck'. At the same time, they picked our brains for suggestions and ideas. In contrast to their mean rejection of us we gave them a free consultation.

The main mandarin showed his skill at dealing with awkward customers by expressing total agreement and apology for the faults and inadequacies of the system, then assured us that changes were in place for the next funding proposals. Future applicants would not be asked to fill out the huge and complex application forms. A sifting process would reduce the number of applicants, who needed only to send in a couple of pages outlining the proposal. Well, thank you for that, we felt like saying, having spent a large chunk of our scant funds on employing someone to negotiate the thick application tome. To make matters worse, he then showed us the high marks our application received, 85% which should have been enough to ensure success. Why then had we been turned down? He grudgingly admitted that the commissioners assumed we had no experience in handling large budgets. We immediately told him

they only had to check Donald's CV. They would find out that for eighteen years, before directing the Soul of Europe, he had run a church in central London and several businesses operating there with a combined budget of over a million pounds a year.

We remembered the Banja Luka civic forum for whom the funds were intended. We made the application on their behalf. We knew how much they needed resources as well as the support from the European Commission, which could reassure them that Europe took Bosnia seriously. The struggles and traumas of the people in that benighted region were a world away from the comfort of these offices where the fate of their projects was sealed.

The mandarins occupied the most influential part of the system. They followed global concerns from one place to another. Attention had moved from Bosnia and focused on other needy trouble spots: Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa. Our point about building up countries from the grassroots to create politically, socially and economically stable regions did not fit in with the charitable, but superficial official reaction to quickly heal surface wounds. Band aid came before sustainability. Such a policy had long been proved to be ultimately self-defeating, as these countries destroyed by war or catastrophe needed more considered long-term development beyond immediate repair. As in Bosnia and Afghanistan, the large input of money to rebuild the infrastructure led to corruption and political and social disarray, with troubled consequences for the future. The international community not knowing how to solve these issues lost interest and found it easier to direct its attention to another area of conflict and chaos.

The mandarins remained defensive so the meeting ended unsatisfactorily. We offered to be advisors and mentors, but the chief mandarin declined saying that all our

suggestions had already been incorporated into the system, that they had nothing to learn from us.

‘If you agree with what I have said, and it is the case that all my suggestions are already part of the process, then why is Bosnia still in such a bad way?’ Donald asked.

We left the Christopher Clark to his heaps of applications and proposals, as well as a heavy cold. The guardian of procedure looked relieved that the meeting had ended and could not wait for the lift to take us downstairs and for us to leave the building.

After our wrestle with the Brussels mandarins we went to meet Dr Sherif, head of the World Islamic Call Society, and his several assistants. These included friendly Omar Farhad, the one in charge of the money: packs of crisp fresh notes stuffed in a suitcase. They stayed at the elegant Metropole Hotel. We had invited them for supper to meet Adnan and his Bosnia team, including the artist Daria and the young student, also called Adnan, whom we had met in Banja Luka. They had just driven in a large ramshackle hired van all the way from Sarajevo. The van contained Daria’s paintings, musical instruments, photographs, and other materials which would be exhibited at the EU Parliament throughout the Bosnia Presentation.

While waiting for them to arrive, we considered our good fortune having found such sympathetic sponsors who, whatever their ulterior motives, did not demand complicated application forms to be correctly filled out with lists of outcomes. The Foreign Office and the European Commission had shut the door on us. Even the MEPs we invited to our presentation in Brussels refused to pay for their supper, or for any part of the event. Not one of them had offered to host it. They reckoned their presence to be a favour to the Soul of Europe.

Fortunately there were exceptions, and these few people gave us enough encouragement not to give up. Ambassador Ian Cliff paid the flights for Mufti Camdzic, Professor Hamidovic and Svetlana Cenic.

Fiona McWhillam before leaving her posting as Head of the British Embassy Office in Banja Luka had informed us bluntly that there were no more funds available for such expenses. However, Ambassador Cliff considered our work to be important, and never refused to help us.

Fiona and the youngsters at the Foreign Office insisted on giving us advice about how to behave in Brussels even though they refused to give the event any material support. They ordered us to have a strong Bosnian Serb nationalist representation at the presentation, something we did not need to be told. They feared upsetting the nationalist government and considered this more important than the issue concerning relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. Their redundant commands to us showed how little they understood what we were doing. They had forgotten the positive outcomes of the Coventry Consultation: the establishing of the Banja Luka civic forum and now made the Brussels presentation and consultation possible. Despite this process which they should have followed and understood, they still did not trust us to know what we were doing. In the market-orientated world, those who control access to money claim the right to say how it should be spent regardless of their lack of experience or knowledge.

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In Bosnia, his own country, Adnan behaved with authority. He always looked smart and in command. At the Coventry Consultation and in Brussels he moved through the foreign space with self-confidence. However, just for a moment when he arrived in the van with Daria and Adnan the Younger, his exhausted grin after a non-stop drive from Sarajevo indicated something melancholy and unexpected: a sense of being an

outsider, an alien, a refugee. The Bosnian van took on the appearance of one of those covered wagons familiar from Wild West films carrying destitute families to new homes, in a land where they were strangers.

Libyan Dr Sherif however looked at home in Brussels. He was used to staying in the best hotels and meeting top people.

The restaurant he took us to seemed to have lost its staff or maybe it did not approve of this sudden Muslim invasion. Nevertheless the evening passed pleasantly with stories and jokes. Dr Sherif discussed general over-use of the Arab exclamation: ‘en ch’allah’, meaning ‘if Allah wills it’, which is always used on parting as a response to ‘see you again’. He explained that the words had lost their currency, being used on every occasion however slight, even for calling a taxi. Reflecting on our experiences of Brussels’ taxis, in which drivers omitted to use the pay meter and overcharged then drove at dangerous speeds in unsound vehicles, I declared that it was precisely when using a taxi in Brussels that ‘en ch’allah’ needed to be said. At which point everybody laughed.

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Next morning we sat in the elaborately ornate vestibule of the Metropole Hotel and waited to be taken up for a meeting with Dr Sherif.

On the one hand we hoped for continuing financial support, and on the other he, representing Libya, wanted more high level meetings to put the World Islamic Call Society on an international footing beyond its current influence in the more impoverished parts of the Muslim world: the countries of the sub-Sahara for instance, which depended on oil-rich Libya. WICS did continue to fund the Soul of Europe for another year and we organized one further conference, a consultation at Windsor Castle to which famous speakers on inter-faith matters would be invited. Beyond that,

Dr Sherif wanted Donald to accompany him on more Ta'aruf conferences in places like Central and Eastern Africa, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Caribbean.

After the Windsor Consultation, Libya stopped funding us although relations remained amicable and Donald would be invited to further conferences there. Then a few years later the Arab revolution changed everything in Libya. For now, in Brussels, the Libyan regime still seemed impregnable: the Colonel a fixture. Dr Sherif came with an entourage of officials each with specific duties: Omar Farhad in first place as guardian of the purse. Others took charge of luggage, and were at the master's beck and call. He did not ask for advice or opinions but indicated what he required with a wave of the hand. Their nervous obedience reminded us of the regime's authoritarian nature.

The Arab revolution killed Gaddafi, and overturned the World Islamic Call Society. We never heard from them again. To this day, no one knows the whereabouts of Dr Sherif.

Meanwhile, without Libya's financial help in the early years of our work we would not have achieved any of our projects. The World Islamic Call Society rescued the Coventry Consultation, and paid for both Brussels and Windsor conferences as well as our travel and administration. This unusual alliance remained opaque in its detail, but transparent in its purpose. Both sides gained advantages: the different agendas based on politics and needs.

We sat in the lounge area of Dr Sherif's spacious hotel suite while his minions bustled in and out ordering coffee and gathering books and material about Libya and Gaddafi's Jamahiriya, what he called the People's Revolution, for us to display in the European Parliament later that evening.

We discussed plans for the Windsor conference, including MPs from each of the three main parties on the invitation list. 'But not idiots like George Galloway!'

insisted Dr Sherif, referring to the maverick then Labour MP from Glasgow, who had blotted his copybook with the party for not only demonstrating against the invasion of Iraq but also for being a vociferous defender of Saddam Hussein and his murderous Ba'ath regime. Dr Sherif talked about the specific necessity for peace in troubled areas of the world so that NGOs could operate independently and safely. He offered to invite the Qatari ambassador in Libya to supper with Donald so that they could together phone the Emir of Qatar and fix a meeting, and was even prepared to pay our fares to Qatar.

'Religion is simple, not complicated,' Dr Sherif declared. 'All we need do is to keep to its principles and general moral values.' Then, with a flourish of the hand he sent his staff to accompany us to a taxi, already laden with boxes of books and leaflets for the evening's event, which consisted of a Presentation by Soul of Europe representatives from Bosnia to invited MEPs of the European Parliament. Dr Sherif hoped to meet influential people at the Presentation, the first of a two-part event. The day after was devoted to a Consultation. Issues raised at the Presentation would be discussed between groups. These were already involved in collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims, and represented different countries in Europe. The Consultation aimed to create a network of these kinds of groups with collaborative political, social, and imaginative programs, all under the flagship of the Ferhadija Mosque project. This international European mission involved all faiths and none. The groups would then be inspired to meet regularly, encourage, support and learn from each other.

SETTING FIRE TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Daria's painting became the centre piece of the evening Presentation. The ten sections fitted together to unfold a panorama of the four main religions that make

Bosnian culture unique. She placed the symbol of the Bogumil faith at the centre. Meaning 'love of God', this heretic sect of early Christianity in Bosnia, believed in the absoluteness of good and evil as a dichotomy lived by human beings. It exerted a deep-rooted psychological influence over the region's history for hundreds of years to the present day. Back then, the geography of Bosnia, with its impenetrable mountain ranges, unbridgeable gorges and powerful cascading rivers kept the country and its indigenous people isolated until invasions from the East and North brought irresistible influences from faiths with more powerful hierarchies: first Roman Catholicism, then Orthodoxy and finally Islam. Judaism had been a significant minority since the Middle Ages, especially after the expulsion of Jews, along with Muslims, from Spain in the 15th century, many fleeing to the Balkans where they received a warm welcome from Ottomans. Before the onslaught of Zionism in the 20th century, relations between Muslims and Jews tended, with a few exceptions, to be respectful and even friendly. Jews fought alongside Serb Orthodox as well as Muslim partisans in the Second World War.

Jews brought with them from Spain welcome business acumen, and a culture of refined skills, developed alongside their Christian and Muslim Moorish neighbours.

Daria's large painting paid tribute to all these influences, depicting the four faiths in their most recognizable forms: the Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals, the Ferhadija Mosque, the Great Synagogue of Sarajevo alongside the Haggadah, and a Bogumil tombstone with its characteristic totemic carvings. The Mostar Bridge symbolised the links between communities and cultures. Daria bound all these elements with a river, symbolic of all the mighty rivers of Bosnia, flowing around and between the religious buildings.

Groups representing different countries in Europe and working on improving relations between Muslims and non-Muslims sat at separate tables. Several MEPs

were present. Svetlana Cenic represented the Bosnian Serbs, and sat with Roy Wilson and Ian Cliff. Adnan opened the Presentation with a film that celebrated the diversity of Bosnian culture. It began and ended with images of the different faiths, the way they used to coexist and now needed to come together again and show the rest of the world how diversity can work. Afterwards Svetlana and Ian Cliff grumbled at the film's partiality, emphasising Muslim suffering and placing the blame for the war on the Serbs. The Serbs, and the international community, preferred to interpret the massacres, ethnic cleansing and destruction of Bosnia as a civil war. The film kept to the facts in a series of images showing the suffering inflicted by politics, the devastation of the World Wars, the attempt of communist Marshal Tito to enforce long-term harmony between the communities, and the dashing of such hopes in the Bosnia War. In punchy journalistic style the images passed in quick succession, but just once Adnan allowed an image to linger: happy crowds in Sarajevo in 1991 demonstrating their desire for peaceful coexistence. Having made his uplifting and hopeful point, he then brutally interrupted it with a razor sharp edit to show Karadjic's speech inciting Bosnian Serbs to take up arms against their neighbours and purify the country of its 'hellish' alien elements. Afterwards Svetlana complained about the emphasis on war and destruction. She said that the European Union should be shown only the positive sides of Bosnian life, the beauty and abundance of its natural resources and not be reminded of atrocities. From her point of view as an economist trying to attract investment, the film did not provide a selling point. Adnan however had made the film with this specific Brussels event in mind. The film focused on the need for different communities to live in harmony. It respected the perspective of history, both distant and recent, rather than drawing a veil over it. The Consultation next day, the second part of the event, became a discussion between the groups from

across Europe on reaching understanding and collaboration in joint projects between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Adnan's film and Daria's painting pitched the theme of the gathering with clarity and imagination. The soundtrack of the film consisted of an ever more insistently loud and bludgeoning arrangement for full orchestra and massed choirs of the originally gentle and delicately-scored slow movement of Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto. It eventually drowned out the words which were being recited by Daria in measured tones. The sound system then failed, reducing the music to an uncomfortable static blur. Only the visual element of the film remained. This had an irresistible rhythm of its own and needed neither music nor commentary.

Editing this book in 2014, over ten years after the event, it is a shock to realize how the situation in Bosnia has deteriorated. Whatever hopes there were for reconciliation and collaboration there have been snuffed out. The division of the country imposed by the Dayton Accord was meant to stop the fighting. Intended to prevent a Muslim recapture of the whole country it has become a permanent separation. What used to be a single table with a line drawn down the middle has been sawn in two. The Muslim Federation half is now also being hacked at to give the Catholic Croat minority hegemony over their region around Mostar and the South West of the country bordering Croatia. There is inevitability to this process. The end result will be to turn Sarajevo and half of Mostar into Muslim ghettos within their own country, along the lines of the Jewish Warsaw Ghetto during the Second World War. History has proved that the purpose of such ghettos is to facilitate ethnic cleansing. Just as the Nazis annihilated the Jewish population in the Warsaw ghetto, so, when the time is right, the Serbs and Croats will then finish off the ethnic cleansing they began in 1992. This time they will have been helped by the international community which authorized the

political divisions and made the task easier. This is not an idle prophecy. Unless a concerted attempt is made by the rest of the world to rescue this predominantly Muslim country from such a fate, it is inevitable. The rest of the Muslim world would not watch this happen without trying to stop it. Bosnia became the focus of international politics in the years leading to the First World War. Once again it is becoming a cause for the next world war.

Ever since the Soul of Europe started its journeys to the Balkans it became clear that the predominantly white Christian and secular Western world feared Muslim incursion into Europe. The division of Bosnia was a blatant attempt to control it. International unwillingness to take care of this small European country, always considered nothing more than an economically insignificant province in the Balkans, has meant, and continues to mean that the Bosnians have not only been left to suffer massacres and atrocities on a scale not witnessed since the Second World War but have been continuously punished afterwards. In stead of embracing this open wound of a country into the European family, given care, healing and support to all its communities, including those who instigated the war, Bosnia has been relegated to the status of a failed state, to be penalised, threatened and bullied. All our travels and efforts at mediation have taught me that the main reason for this lack of care is the ambivalent attitude by the rest of Europe to the Islamic presence in this continent.

Most commentators remain pessimistic about the future. The Office of the High Representative, put in place to prevent total breakup of the country, no longer functions with the authority invested in it by the international community, and is now being ignored by all parties which pursue their political ends independently. The Soul of Europe remains persistently hopeful in the teeth of current cynicism. Slowly, with great difficulty, and despite substantial opposition from growing Far Right groups which influence the mainstream, the Muslim minority is being integrated into Europe.

There is a stark choice to be made in the future about Bosnia. Either it becomes more of a failed state and the three main groups there separate more completely from each other leaving the Muslims isolated and vulnerable in ghettos, and so preparing the way for a final solution that history shows cannot be ruled out; or our attitudes to the country have to change radically.

Looking back ten years this gathering in Brussels represented a significant step towards such a radical rethinking of attitudes. For this reason it is important that it be remembered and reported.

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Pat Cox, the then President of the European Parliament, paid a flying visit. Surrounded by minders and being shunted from event to event, he appreciated Donald's welcoming joke: 'Do you know where you are?' He gave a stock speech of encouragement then left for another engagement. Dr Sherif looked pleased: whatever else happened during the presentation, the president had acknowledged Libya's presence.

General Morillon, another guest at the presentation, had been the first person to enter Srebrenica after the massacre of thousands of Muslim men. That experience changed his life. After retiring for several years, he became an eminent figure in European politics. 'Europe did not die in Sarajevo,' he asserted. 'Sarajevo lives today and hopes to be alive again, enriched from the diversity of its people and from what we are doing here today.'

Several MEPs concurred with the general. Ulla Sandbaek from Denmark declared: 'We are the same. We have the capacity to sit together and to rebuild, just as we can destroy.' Graham Watson a Liberal MEP from England compared the religions in the Balkans to tectonic plates shifting and causing upheaval. Doris Pack talked angrily about the unresolved situation in Bosnia with specific reference to the sufferings of

Catholics in Banja Luka. ‘There are no Catholics there,’ she shouted, ‘So how can there be reconciliation? They are just not returning.’

Peter Ashby our consultation facilitator, who had contributed to the success of the Coventry Consultation, came to Brussels on a similar mission. He invited responses to the Presentation from these European Parliament representatives to raise issues for discussion next day at the Consultation when the groups could air their views and describe their own projects and aims.

Peter Ashby’s skill as a facilitator lay in his ability to break down people’s defences, create a level field for everyone to contribute freely, and persuade participants to speak without feeling intimidated. Like an orchestral conductor, he could appear controlling and manipulative, but he kept both the Presentation and the Consultation animated and dynamic. Such a disparate group of people, some over-awed by the Brussels Parliament building, needed this kind of facilitation.

As is usually the case with these new ventures, the event had its share of incidents and misunderstandings.

The groups from England, Denmark, Belgium, Germany and Spain sat at eight tables, unable to understand each other but trying to get acquainted. By moving multi-lingual staff from table to table we hoped to stimulate discussion and relax people, so they made the most of the evening. A German translator managed to keep the group of women from Duisburg informed. The French translator did not arrive till the following day so I found myself interpreting badly for the representatives from Belgium and France. The Muslim representatives complained about the food not being prepared according to traditional halal rules and could not understand why they had been invited. Not intimidated by their surroundings, they looked defensive and paid critical attention to everything being said. They had come to push their own

agendas but were unexpectedly moved by the Bosnia Presentation, expressing sympathy for the situation there. They praised the film and the paintings.

Then Mufti Camdzic arrived, late. The plane had been delayed by bad weather and missed the connection in Munich. He rushed in half way through the supper which followed the Presentation and was being served at the eight tables. Professor Hamidovic accompanied him along with Zlatan Karabegovic, the man in Banja Luka appointed by Dr Ceric to liaise with the Soul of Europe on the Ferhadija project.

While the professor hung architectural drawings of the mosque onto large screens, the mufti stood in front of Daria's painting and launched into a long speech in Bosnian.

He spoke rapidly and loudly for several minutes, most people not understanding a word. Eventually he stopped talking, so Zlatan Karabegovic could translate the speech.

Zlatan swallowed hard, paused a while, then said: 'Praise to God!' and fell silent.

Everyone laughed.

Adnan fled the room in embarrassment. This awkward hiatus made people even more attentive. Zlatan then continued for a few seconds in broken English that no one could understand and eventually he gave up, tongue-tied and looking alarmed.

Suddenly Svetlana's powerful voice intervened, and everyone stared at the formidable woman with raven black hair who was taking over the translation.

Embarrassed, the mufti went on with his speech, and the Bosnian Serb Vice-Presidential Economics Advisor became his interpreter. Only a few present in that room grasped the significance of this unexpected alliance: an enemy helping out someone whom she had once tried to destroy.

The mufti spoke about God loving those people who love justice and cooperation, reconciliation, justice and forgiveness. He reminded everyone of the war and the

hundreds of mosques destroyed. Professor Hamidovic then outlined plans for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque. The listeners responded warmly to the mufti, coming up to him afterwards with words of friendship.

The mufti interpreted this enthusiasm as a sign that the mosque had taken over the agenda of the event, so when the German group suggested a link between the mosques in Duisburg and Banja Luka he dismissed the offer with a lofty wave of the hand, saying he was only interested in raising money for his own mosque. He misunderstood the purpose of this gathering in Brussels: to establish a European dimension of the Ferhadija project, which brought communities from all over the continent to support each other in their different and various activities. He tried to hijack the Consultation next day, but Peter Ashby drew on all his skills as a facilitator to prevent that, managing to silence the mufti without alienating him.

Various MEPs then came up to the mufti to ask what help he needed, meaning political and personal support. Not wanting to waste this opportunity the mufti stood straight, puffed his chest out, stared at them challengingly and said: 'I want two hundred thousand pounds.'

Adnan refused to translate this and shook his head, embarrassed at the mufti's rudeness.

The Presentation ended with Christopher Beazley, the host MEP, lighting the Soul of Europe candle together with Dr Sherif, Mufti Camdzic, Father Barsanuphe, the Orthodox representative from France, and the Soul of Europe's Chairman, Bishop John Austin. Christopher Beazley cracked a joke about his childhood, a time when he was so keen on setting things alight that he had been in danger of being an arsonist.

After the lighting ceremony the MEP left the candle on one of the tables. As the guests were leaving I noticed the container suddenly catching light, and rushed over in time to extinguish the blaze.

Christopher Beazley had come within a whisker of setting fire to the European Parliament.

Having only a few valuable hours left in the European Parliament, Peter Ashby worked everyone hard the next day at the Consultation, focusing on the main purpose: to establish a network of Muslim and non-Muslim groups across Europe which would encourage the representatives from the different countries to keep contact, advise and support each other's projects.

People moved chairs from behind tables, so the whole group sat in a large semi-circle, with a space of empty floor in the middle, on which they placed sheets of papers with ideas and diagrams, plans and lists, arguments and problems.

The Twelve Cities Network which the Soul of Europe set up in 2013 with Muslim representatives from England, Germany, France and other European countries is reviving the objectives of the Brussels Consultation. Cross-generational collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims puts the network on a surer footing. Secure and trusting relationships within and between the different groups did not exist in 2003. The Muslims then were suspicious of our agenda, even though they appreciated being present. They still felt patronized as an alien community being allowed to live in Europe, but only grudgingly, and regularly having to deal with hatred, bigotry and violence. Tensions needed resolution. These reflected the stresses of relationships in society at large.

At the same time Mufti Camdzic chafed at not being able to use the event in Brussels as a pitch for the Ferhadija Mosque. He complained, and at the end of the final meeting muttered weakly: 'I hope you will build the mosque before I die!'

MOVING STONES

WINTER IN BANJA LUKA 2004

Fresh snow on tree branches and roofs converted Banja Luka into a Christmas card.

Disgruntled men in black leather jackets, faded jeans and shaggy hair trudged along the main street, or sat scowling in groups in the town cafes, smoking and drinking beer, or sipping small cups of espresso.

Svetlana soured the atmosphere further by laying into Adnan and his film in Brussels. Meeting us at the Kazamat Castle Restaurant, which overlooked the River Vrbas, she smoked incessantly and angrily, putting distance between us as she announced: 'I could be a star among my own people and destroyed the Soul of Europe if I had reported it.' Not for the first time in Bosnia were we forced into damage limitation, feeling that now-familiar knot in the stomach tightening at being reminded of the unbridgeable chasm between the communities in this small country. The film had however shown nothing but the truth.

Unexpectedly, and in contrast to Svetlana, Bishop Jefrem later gave us a particularly warm welcome, going out of his way to be friendly to Adnan, whom he still liked despite a priest reporting from the recent conference in Graz attended by Adnan, that our project manager had attacked the Orthodox Church.

The final event we attended in Banja Luka then reminded us why we had to keep returning to this most stagnant of towns in Europe. The mufti invited Donald to address the Islamic community after Friday worship to explain the progress or otherwise of rebuilding the mosque. The downstairs hall in the Islamic Centre had been converted into a prayer room, and a crush of several hundred people knelt on the floor, mostly elderly men, while women in white veils were at the back. Few young people attended; a reminder that the war had either killed them or scattered them as

refugees across Europe and beyond. The huddled group of men and women looked like frightened mice, eyes turned to Donald in mute appeal. At one moment in the speech Donald spread his arms out to encourage them, and immediately the whole crowd of listeners, tears streaming down their faces, responded by stretching their arms back at him in a gesture of supplication. The sight of all those hands raised above drenched faces put into perspective the ruling nationalists' smug defensiveness, the parochial concerns of the Orthodox Church, and the indifference of the majority of Bosnian Serbs who commandeered the streets of the town where none of these elderly Muslims dared to show their faces.

Two activities dominated this latest visit to Banja Luka. We relinquished control of the civic forum because the Foreign Office stopped funding us, and reassessed Adnan's position in the forum. It felt like the end of an era. The Coventry Consultation two and a half years previously had led to the establishment of the Banja Luka civic forum: a period of uncertainty, insecurity, and mistakes. The Ferhadija remained our main focus, but even that project needed to be handed over to an organization which would take responsibility for rebuilding the mosque. Inviting experts skilled at reconciliation with experience in the world's chief trouble spots, defined the next stage.

TALKING TO BISHOP JEFREM: 'NO ONE TALKS TO ME'

Because heavy snow prevented the bishop from travelling to remote villages in his diocese, he found time to see us, and greeted us warmly. The rumours of Adnan badmouthing the Orthodox Church had been filtered to us through Svetlana, but the bishop made a special effort to be friendly to him. Either he had not heard the rumours, which Adnan denied, or did not take them seriously.

We sat in the bishop's pristine study that looked as though nothing ever happened in it: the desktop empty and polished, everything filed away in drawers. Icons and portraits of past bishops decorated the walls, including an old photograph of an armed and bushy-bearded Serb leader looking incongruous in the saintly company.

Donald presented the bishop with a recording of an Orthodox service sung in Welsh. The bishop updated us on his extensive building program. Work had stalled on the Banja Luka cathedral, not because of lack of funds which the bishop assured us were plentiful, but for lack of adequately trained craftsmen: 'Quality is more important than time.' Meanwhile the library in his home monastery now had a copper-plated roof.

We inquired after the fiercely combative monk, whom we had met there two years earlier on our drive round the bishop's diocese, and who had defended Karadjic. The bishop laughed, knowing exactly who we meant. The bishop too had trouble with this self-righteous monk but defended him, explaining: 'He is a strict Orthodox. However strictness should not stop him getting on with others. He isn't on his own anymore. Another young novice has joined the monastery.'

When Donald reminded the bishop that the Soul of Europe could be a conduit for any comments and criticisms about the international community, the bishop seized the opportunity to lambast the Office of the High Representative: 'They think they can decide everything. The international community should do less and allow people to do more. They must transfer power back to the people.' He meant to himself. Then he added sarcastically: 'Once the High Representative has finished here, he should go to Ireland and deal with the problems there. He is being very irritating at the moment, always commanding, bossing people about instead of encouraging. The dignity of people counts.'

Ten years later the Office of the High Representative relaxed its hold and influence, leaving the politicians to make decisions. This resulted in more entrenched corruption,

political stalemate between the communities, and hardening divisions. Had the Office of the High Representative kept a tighter rein on the corruption and enforced unity, then Bosnia might not now be fracturing into three separate countries.

‘Nice words can open a golden door,’ said the bishop, quoting a Serbian proverb, and added: ‘Mild words and strong arguments are for reasonable people.’

We pointed out that representatives of the international community took little notice of religion and religious leaders, but that this was a mistake. Unlike politicians, religious leaders in the Balkans kept close contact with their communities.

Confronted with an invitation to Donald’s 70th birthday party, even at such a prestigious address as Lambeth Palace, the bishop made excuses. ‘I may be my own master, and can order others to do things,’ he joked, ‘but others are always ordering me about and telling me what I must do.’ Realizing that the party took place on Ascension Day, the same date for Orthodox as well as Catholics and Anglicans, he cheered up. ‘I will be at the opening of a new church,’ he announced with relief, ‘and am also expected at the Synod.’ Then he added that the bishop’s upcoming birthday would not be a party but perhaps a special service in a small church.

Meetings with Bishop Jefrem, like those with Svetlana and Mufti Camdzic, but not with Bishop Komarica, regularly turned into diplomatic and political minefields. We had to learn quickly how to juggle opportunities, accepting a few refusals to make way for a few more important acceptances. We never really expected the bishop to attend the birthday at Lambeth Palace. His presence would be needed more at the opening of the Ferhadija Mosque, and for another project to bring Catholic and Orthodox priests from Banja Luka together at Walsingham in England. Poor relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Bosnia were the cause of troubled history in the region for over a thousand years, and were more destructive than fear of Islam. Priests from these two constituencies were ordered by Bishop Jefrem never to

meet. This nurtured mutual mistrust and hatred. On our two journeys around the Catholic and Orthodox Banja Luka dioceses, we could have been in two different countries, neither bearing any relation to the other.

We discussed the possibility of Catholic and Orthodox priests from Bosnia travelling together to meet at the church of Walsingham in England. The Virgin Mary had appeared to a nobleman in the Middle Ages and invited him to rebuild Jesus' Nazareth home in the small Norfolk village. It became a place of pilgrimage throughout Europe. The Reformation in England destroyed the church, but in the 19th century an Anglican priest rebuilt the shrine which is now venerated by Catholics and Orthodox, as well as Anglicans. The three Christian denominations have churches there and thousands of pilgrims visit each year.

The three priests in Walsingham were equally enthusiastic about this Bosnia project and wished to visit Banja Luka, meet with Bishops Bishop Komarica and Bishop Jefrem, discuss plans for a joint pilgrimage, and help start a conversation between Bosnian Catholics and Orthodox.

Bishop Jefrem did not feel pressured, and the present plan appealed to his hospitality. He gladly agreed to welcome the priests. The priests could then try and persuade Bishop Jefrem to accept the invitation and bring priests to Walsingham, maybe in 2005. The Orthodox priest at Walsingham told Donald: 'We have no choice. We have to do this. This is also something we want to do.' The Catholic priest declared: 'This is an important opportunity for us.'

'It's good and nice they come here,' said Bishop Jefrem, smiling at Donald's attempts to reassure him that the bishop would not be rushed or steamrollered into anything, then added: 'But to be honest, there is no need for help to get contact between ourselves.'

Considering the efforts we had taken to get this far with the bishop, and the project to bring him to England again, these words were nothing if not disingenuous.

Having squeezed this acceptance from the bishop, Donald gave him an opportunity to go on the attack again by inviting his comments on the international community. The bishop expounded with relish on a list of problems the international community were refusing to deal with, such as the influx of refugees. The bishop took care not to specify the ethnicity of Serbs moving into properties previously owned by Muslims, who had been ethnically cleansed from the city. He spoke of the need for more churches where these new Serbs could worship, and about lack of homes and houses, joblessness etc. etc.. 'If the international community wants to rule then it must remember that power comes with responsibility.' He then referred to the situation in Mostar, a city divided roughly equally between Catholics and Muslims, where the Orthodox Church was weak. 'People are arguing and fighting again there. Jobs and business might bring people together. Poverty divides people.'

'No one talks to me!' the bishop sighed in exasperation. 'I never hear from the international community. The issues of Bosnia today are reconstruction, bringing people back to work, and after that we can talk. We must give hope and confidence first. Now there is only destruction of the economy.' He did not consider lack of money to be an issue. When we suggested that Orthodox churches elsewhere in Europe could be persuaded to respond financially to the immediate needs of small communities in Bosnia, the bishop said: 'To be honest it is a small secret, but religious communities are not in such financial or material difficulties.' Bishop Komarica and Mufti Camdzic would have been surprised to hear this, but they might have agreed with his following assertion: 'People, even without money, take care of their own communities. But the big concern is for the nation, for society.'

As we were taking our leave the bishop made a particular point of once again giving Adnan a special hug. It was always touching to see how much the bishop liked the Muslim from Sarajevo.

FRACTURES

The citizens of Banja Luka needed space for airing their feelings, prejudices, fears and to feel free, after centuries of oppression under one tyranny after the other, to talk openly about the return of Muslims to this ethnically cleansed town. Our purpose of creating a European dimension was meant to reassure a battered and wounded nation that Civic forums, of which there were many successful examples elsewhere in Europe, help the democratic processes; and that re-integration can happen. The groups which had gathered in Brussels were meant to support them by example and also by collaboration.

However not only were the Bosnian Serbs, who claimed half the country for their own ethnically pure nation, suspicious of these kind of activities that might threaten their hegemony, but our own Foreign Office and other representatives of the international community also expressed no faith in such measures. They preferred to let the increasingly ineffective Office of the High Representative issue policies and commands, which were at first half-heartedly followed then eventually ignored. Bosnian politicians had centuries of experience under the Ottoman Empire, and then a few decades under communism, to learn the art of biding their time. Over years and decades they wore down the patience of interlopers, invaders and foreigners who they knew would eventually leave or become weak enough to manipulate. The international community was aware of this, and defended its ineffective policies with the repeated mantra: 'At least the fighting has stopped.'

But the war had not ended. Exacerbated by unfettered corruption and lack of justice, it continued in peoples' hearts.

The international community failed to see that a healthy functioning Civic Forum would counter these negative developments, make it less corrupt and more just, and create the kind of democratic process, necessary despite its flaws, which could at least be open to criticism and improvement.

The cynical manner of the international community's attitude to Bosnia became evident during our relationship with Robert Contractor, the new head of the British Embassy office in Banja Luka, taking over from Fiona McWhillam. He first approved of the civic forum, then removed essential support and finally in a coup de grace laid the blame for its failure on us.

Young, bright-eyed and enthusiastic, Robert Contractor had already spent several years in the diplomatic service in Skopje, learnt the language, married a Macedonian, became a father, and had commitment to the region.

This boded well for the Banja Luka civic forum which he promised to nurture so long as the management kept him informed and involved. He wanted a higher profile and greater dynamism in the forum's activities, involving the media more. The forum should make use of the embassy. Rather than being a strict task-master like Fiona McWhillam, he encouraged, did not criticize, and seemed to understand the problems of such an NGO trying to survive and prosper in Bosnia which had no tradition of such forums. A similar forum he had supported in Macedonia collapsed after the international community withdrew funding, and he declared, reassuringly, that the same fate should not happen to the Banja Luka civic forum.

The Soul of Europe's Ferhadija Project was a feather in the UK's cap. In our absence Ambassador Cliff followed up the historic meeting chaired by the Soul of Europe the previous year with another between Vice-President Cavic and Dr Ceric, at which the

Republika Srpska government guaranteed payment towards the building of the mosque they destroyed, and allotted funds specifically to lay the foundations. The ambassador brought together the presidents and Vice-presidents at what Svetlana described to us later as a ‘friendly’ occasion. The Muslim Vice-President of the Federation took special responsibility for the Ferhadija because Cavic, now promoted to President of the Republika Srpska, could not be seen by his nationalist Bosnian Serb party, established by Karadjic, to be directly involved with rebuilding the mosque. The ambassador also met the religious leaders who gave the Soul of Europe a good press, though Bishop Jefrem could not resist a joke at our ‘persistence’. Support from all religious communities was essential to the project and the ambassador noted the Soul of Europe’s unique ability to gain the leaders’ trust equally. This explained Robert Contractor’s current enthusiasm about meeting us.

Discussing the international community’s relationship with Bosnia, he told us that numbers of SFOR troops were being reduced, and the Office of the High Representative would wind down after Paddy Ashdown’s tenure came to an end. Even the international community acknowledged the negative influence of the Dayton Accord. The country had been divided on ethnic lines when every effort should have been made to integrate the different groups after the war. Doris Pack at the European Parliament recommended a return to the pre-war multi-ethnic shape of Bosnia. Her idealistic proposal however ignored the international community’s counter-productive interference there, which reinforced divisions along ethnic lines ever since the signing of the Dayton Accord.

Despite pleas for goodwill among the ethnic groups reality spoke for itself. Catholics and Muslims feared returning to their home and were settling elsewhere in the world. This unresolved issue legitimized the wartime ethnic cleansing more and more with each passing year. Bitterness and mistrust due to lack of justice continued

to animate the politics of the whole country. Already in 2003 internationals were coming to accept the idea of Republika Srpska splitting from Bosnia, maybe to join Serbia, the Croats claiming independence for their territory around Mostar and the Muslims being left in a small ghetto-like enclave around Sarajevo. Few people were prepared to acknowledge that, given the present divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world, such an outcome could only be a threat to future peace.

Robert Contractor judged Doris Pack's plan to be unfeasible but reckoned that the nationalists were no longer a problem because he reckoned they would lose influence in future elections. Such optimism flew in the face of facts and our experience. Nationalists were gaining power and popularity in Belgrade even though, or probably in spite of, their leaders awaiting trial at the Hague Tribunal. Another civil war could not be ruled out, nor be kept within the boundaries of Bosnia. The world-wide Muslim community would not permit persecution of their brothers and sisters to happen again.

Our project seemed fragile and hopeless. But an encounter with the persecuted Muslims of Banja Luka at the Islamic Centre that followed our meeting with Robert Contractor only strengthened our resolve not to waver.

THE CATHEDRAL WITHOUT A TOWER

One night after returning home I dreamed about Banja Luka.

I dreamed of two cathedrals standing side by side. The Orthodox cathedral had colourful murals and incense swirling up into the dome. Next door a Catholic cathedral opened its doors and showed itself to be full of glistening new marble sculptures. Both cathedrals rose into the sky, shoulder to shoulder like wrestlers sizing each other up. I stood with the silent crowds on the street and commented on the grandeur of these buildings, how the town barely merited such splendour. I noted the absence of the Ferhadija Mosque, still waiting to join them. Just before waking I

observed that the Orthodox cathedral lacked its tower. This struck me as being significant: an empty space made visible.

The dream reminded me of our vision of Banja Luka as a unique city in Europe, a place where three religions expressed their different varieties of faith in splendid buildings, music, and a lively multi-ethnic culture. These buildings had once been part of the city in reality. The Catholic cathedral had been restored in its modernist concrete style, with curving roof and garish stained glass. The Orthodox cathedral remained unfinished, and although in my dream the tower did not exist, in reality it rose high above the surrounding buildings, intent on being taller than the minaret of the Ferhadija Mosque before its destruction. We tried incessantly to persuade politicians and civic leaders in Banja Luka that, once the mosque had been rebuilt as it used to be, then the city would become a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world to see how a tradition of coexistence between religions had been resurrected after war, and become an inspiration for all people everywhere.

During this visit to Banja Luka we witnessed the stagnation of the city. Nothing had moved forward; no improvement to its economy and social life. Even the theatre had closed down.

Our meeting with the civic forum took place in an old people's club. An elderly lady sat by a tiny stove which tried in vain to heat the persistently refrigerated room. Wrapped up in a cloak and boots she occasionally threw some strips of wood ripped from a fruit box on top of the faintly smouldering ashes. Throughout the meeting the door kept opening, letting in gusts of icy air from outside, and old men tried to enter and approach the stove but the woman angrily drove them away. We felt bad, because our presence may have been the reason for them not being able to gather for company in a place which no doubt provided a little more heat than their own homes.

Only Sanela, Slavica and a woman from the Catholic charity attended the meeting, each representing the three main ethnic groups in the city. The others had either caught cold or were away.

‘How’s it been?’ asked Donald.

‘So so,’ shrugged Sanela.

‘Anything good?’ Donald tried to elicit some news.

‘We are still together,’ said Slavica more cheerfully, putting a line under the frictions which had marked the first months of the forum’s management board. ‘We had plenty of meetings, discussed future steps and we are satisfied that we did what we could: good things. We can talk about them later.’

‘We opened the office with working hours,’ added Sanela. ‘One day in the morning, another day in the afternoon. Slavica and I take turns.’

‘What programs and projects?’

‘We stick to the original program,’ said Slavica. ‘We have done the Quality of Life program, the questionnaire is complete, and we are finishing sorting out the statistics. There are interesting results and questions. We expect the results by February in five days time. When that’s done, questions will be raised in the City Council. Then we go publicly with the results. We will have a press conference and make the material available to all the media, TV and papers. Some TV companies should be interested because of the questions. The material is available for everybody.’

Suddenly the atmosphere lightened and everyone felt enthused that the forum had begun its work and was making a mark on Banja Luka.

Then problems emerged. Sanela spoke about plans to arrange a press conference, when the results of the questionnaire were to be published, and said: ‘We didn’t finish our program, because we didn’t sign a contract with the PR firm; also because we didn’t have money for the other programs.’

This illustrated the perennial difficulties between internationals and local organizations such as the Banja Luka civic forum: above all poor communication. Had they told us, we could have raised money and sent it. As usual, we waited week after week to hear from someone, but no one ever contacted us. Even the information about the PR firms came in dribs and drabs, and only at the end of two months did it arrive, and then only to tell us that not one of the PR firms had any credibility or use. These firms conjured figures out of thin air for work needed to be done, varying from a few hundred euros to thirty thousand. Yet everything they were offering could just as well be done by members of the forum: such as contacting the media, producing reports etc..

‘Use us!’ exclaimed Donald, and told them that Robert Contractor had offered to help with ‘enticing’ the media. Meanwhile we would transfer money for the programs and printing. ‘What about the competition for Bureaucrat of the Year?’

‘They are rebuilding the city council,’ explained Sanela. ‘There are offices all over the place, so it will be difficult to choose a Bureaucrat of the Year right now. During March they will return to the city council, and then we can do it. We have a tradition of funding a travel prize for the best pupils in Banja Luka. The Bureaucrat of the Year can go on, but meanwhile we need to reward good pupils. Perhaps the UK will host the winning students.’

‘The civic forum needs to establish its credibility,’ Donald began, reminding them of the particular purpose of the forum as a catalyst for democratic change. ‘Take for example the pictures of Karadjic and Mladic plastered everywhere.’ These posters were appearing all over the city to remind people that the Republika Srpska should not lose its independence from the rest of Bosnia, even if it could not be a separate country. The posters signalled Serb pride in their part of the Bosnia War and gave warning to the international community that the Bosnian Serb majority in the

Republika Srpska considered these war criminals national heroes. Donald went on: 'This is an immediate issue the civic forum could attend to, calling meetings, speaking in the media, getting a discussion going. There in January everything closes down because of religious and national holidays. Is this a good thing for a town which is in such a poor economic state? Some of these ideas will succeed, others not, but we learn from them. The civic forum is like a ringmaster in a circus. It does not campaign, but it organizes consultations. If I were living here I would say: let's try this, let's see where it worked, let's see where it didn't work, and then go to the next thing.'

Slavica then announced that she had been appointed regional co-ordinator for regional elections. Such a coincidence meant the civic forum had a chance of making a difference. 'I already have an audience,' she said. 'We need to educate people about elections. I just need to know how we fit the civic forum in. We will have meetings and I want to represent the civic forum without interfering with the other organizers.'

'What do you think about all this?' Donald suddenly asked the woman from the Catholic charity who always sat at every meeting without speaking.

'The civic forum needs to react to concrete things happening,' she began, as though a dam had burst. 'We are not finding the way; we have not built up our credibility. We need help with that.'

'Respond to local issues, publicise them. You then become credible,' explained Donald.

'We talk about it all the time,' the woman carried on. 'Ideas, but not anything practical.'

'Are the ideas too complicated?'

'No.'

'Are there not enough people?'

‘Might be. Or we don’t know how to organize ourselves better. So we search for PR. We have good will, but don’t know how to proceed.’

‘If you respond to local issues you will need more people,’ Donald suggested.

‘Some people are missing here,’ the normally silent woman observed, referring to the fact that not all the management board were present at this meeting, but also acknowledging Donald’s remark.

‘What freedom to we have to act?’ asked Sanela.

‘We need to find ways of fundraising,’ said Donald. ‘We failed with the EIDHR in Brussels. But you can go to the European Commissioner’s office in Banja Luka or Sarajevo, see what funding there is for strengthening civic society for local NGOs.’

Sanela told us that there were fifty thousand Euros available for such funding.

After discussing the transfer of authority from the Soul of Europe to the Banja Luka civic forum, Donald promised to speak with the British Council about funding a student prize. The winner could go to Bangor University where there were places available for such awards.

Sanela told us about the possibility of mounting an exhibition of Banja Luka photographs in the Banski Dvor during April.

Slavica ended the meeting on a positive note: ‘We have the full support of the City Assembly for the civic forum.’

Despite being aware of all the obstacles and difficulties we left the meeting sure that if the forum had any chance at all, these were the kind of determined and skilled people to ensure its future.

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STONES AND TEARS

We never knew how Mufti Camdzic would greet us, whether a punch or a warm hug, generally both: one quickly after the other, in any order.

When we arrived at the Islamic Centre to talk to the assembled worshippers he had bad news for us. Wearing a French beret which made him look more like a resistance fighter than a mufti, he showed us local newspaper articles accusing the Soul of Europe of stealing money from Ferhadija funds. If only there was money to steal! ‘We need to put a stop to that,’ he announced, referring to the reports, although later he would attack us for being dishonest. He suggested a meeting with representatives of the diplomatic corps in Sarajevo on our next visit. The Irish ambassador and a French diplomat had invited the mufti to Paris, and told him there were funds for the project from the European Union. We had to disillusion him. The promises were empty because the European Union had a policy of not providing funds for reconstructing destroyed religious buildings.

‘We need to start moving the stones,’ said the mufti, brushing aside this unpleasant information. He suggested we attend a meeting of Bosnian imams to reassure the Islamic community we could be trusted.

A crisis in Adnan’s personal life overshadowed this latest visit to Bosnia. Daria had decided to split up from him. At the same time he was diagnosed with heart trouble. He needed to slow his heartbeat down with medication. His uncle had died from similar trouble recently while still in his forties, so Adnan needed to get his mind round several big shocks. He continued to translate and drive us around but could not focus on the work. He spent most of the time ringing and texting friends, paying us limited attention. We decided to take the train to Zagreb so he could return to Sarajevo. Meanwhile we needed to discuss changes in the Soul of Europe, the new nature of his work and how he would be paid in the future. We depended on Libya continuing to fund our work. This now looked increasingly unlikely.

We spent the last hour in the Larnaca Restaurant, by the tennis courts, and looked on while Adnan focused on his mobile, and at every squeak he silenced it angrily before sending another long text.

The appearance of Karadjic posters reminding people he was ‘watching them’ and ‘would always be with them’ depressed us, as did the Serbian nationalist party’s victory over the alternative democratic alliance in Belgrade.

Banja Luka now seemed a lost cause.

However, the elderly men and women crouching in rows on the floor of a room in the Islamic Centre, all staring at Donald in mute appeal, tears in their eyes and arms stretched out, reminded us why we were in Banja Luka, and why we kept returning. This abandoned community could not be forgotten, and we would stick by them until their mosque had been rebuilt.

FINAL JOURNEY TO LIBYA

FEBRUARY 2004

Libya coming out of the political wilderness meant a surge of travellers, so we no longer enjoyed an official reception. On previous flights to this pariah of nations, the few people on the plane were made up of several Libyan nationals and a few noisy Irish men, getting tanked up with alcohol before landing. There were good relations between Ireland and Libya, reminding us of Gaddafi’s support for the IRA, among other terrorist organizations. No longer did a car wait for us on the runway. Nor were we served coffee and sweets in a first class lounge while friendly, deferential officials dealt with our passports and visas. This time an intimidating, fit, steel-haired minder met us off the plane then steered us past long queues of arrivals. These were being slowly processed by customs officials baffled by new regulations and the large

numbers. The minder knew the officials personally, shook their hands, smiled fiercely, called on favours and managed to sort us out quickly while the stationary queues waited disconsolately.

The staff of the grand Al-Meri Hotel were preparing for a state visit from Malta. They carried crates of bottled water, bowls of plastic flowers and large mysterious objects that looked like beehives in hats. A mechanical piano in the hotel lobby tinkled songs from the shows. *Send in the Clowns* and *Memory*, on perpetual loop, were incessantly interrupted by the loud beeping of security alert alarms at the entrance.

On the first evening we sat alone in the otherwise empty hotel restaurant, where a buffet banquet had been laid out with the kind of dishes described in an Arabian Night: every kind of salad, battered fish, stewed and roasted meats, and cream desserts including crème caramel, a Libyan speciality, floating silky smooth and pale in large discs on russet lakes. The waiters smiled at us, baring their teeth, and we just hoped more guests would arrive, so the feast on display might not go to waste.

Next day a car whisked us to the World Islamic Call Society centre on the outskirts of Tripoli. The driver took no note of a new set of traffic lights and plunged straight into the scrum of cars, penetrating them with loud hoots, then somehow emerged the other side unscathed.

The exhausting frequency of meetings contrasted with our first visit to Libya, when we spent most of each day waiting aimlessly in the hotel lobby. The days were now too short as the chauffeur took us from one meeting to another. These meetings turned out to be a charade. The Soul of Europe's usefulness to Libya was coming to an end, and they were looking for a way to cut us loose.

Meetings with Dr Sherif were usually straight forward. Everyone else kept silent, respectful and intimidated, while the secretary general of the World Islamic Call

Society expounded his views. Conversations between us flowed without interruption. In his absence, however, the various deputies turned into bosses, questioned our proposals, insisted on altering them, then stared at the papers with furrowed brows, stalling decisions. We now had to deal with another steel-haired, intimidating man, Ageli Elmeri, whom we had never met before and of whom Dr Sherif seemed afraid. A government official, Ageli Elmeri expressed no interest in either Ta'aruf or the Soul of Europe. He came to the Windsor Conference with the sole purpose of bringing our relationship with the World Islamic Call Society to an end.

To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God
Surah 2.115 The Koran

Dr Sherif explained to us that the Koranic command Ta'aruf, 'know each other', was originally directed at the faction-ridden world of Islam in the first years of its history. Expressing the concept of Ta'aruf, the prophet Mohamed tried to prevent the infighting and dynastic struggles which he correctly foresaw would twist the meaning of his basically humane message: that all people of all faiths, all over the world, should understand and tolerate one another. Other faiths suffered similar conflicts of dogmas and interpreting sacred texts. Schisms in the Christian Church alone initiated a number of the most violent and destructive epochs in European and world history.

Dr Sherif quoted more from the Koran: 'Whoever believes in God and the hereafter and does good deeds, then salvation is for all those.' He interpreted this to mean: 'Mutual dislike should not affect our opinions about piety and salvation, religion and the afterlife. We should believe that all religions must do good and that leads to salvation. Even Muslims can be bad. So we all need restructuring of our orientation. We all need to know the truth, working from all sides. The work we are now doing

together takes our work forwards and into a new tradition. We can't cheat on this.

Tremendous work can be done.'

He put his finger on the significance of our inter-faith partnership: that it involved a radical new way of thinking in order to bring the different faiths and traditions on to the same path again: a basic humanity which defined the substance of all religions and that they in fact shared, regardless of differences. The verse on Ta'aruf directed Muslims to know each other first and then other religions. Dr Sherif continued: 'Trouble starts when people insist that they alone know the truth. This is the seed of fundamentalism common to all religious extremists. The Koran stipulates: read Ta'aruf among each other, then you can learn how to do it together.' Dr Sherif explained: 'Good work goes round', meaning that good deeds would be eventually recognized and honoured.

We then sat in various offices working on proposals and fine-tuning the budget. New faces kept appearing. What had happened to the people we knew before? An elderly stranger in a long coat joined us at the first meeting, and more people we had never seen before turned up at subsequent meetings. Each time we would be solemnly introduced with flowery language but never saw them again. During the meetings more unfamiliar faces looked round the door, grinning and curious, sometimes entering to shake our hands, eyes glistening with delight, and then disappeared. Mobile phones kept interrupting the meetings with unexpected individual ring-tones. *Scotland the Brave* always sounded for Muftah Abuaisha; *Old MacDonald had a Farm* for someone else.

Outside the Hotel El Meri young men lounged at street corners, each one alone, smoking and idly watching the passing traffic. They leaned back on the wall, one knee sticking out with the foot tucked up behind.

Inside the Hotel El Meri several large African queens in magnificent turquoise robes stitched with sparkling gold thread swayed slowly and with dignity up and down the lobby while their sons, bored well-dressed young princes, sat on sofas scowling at everyone.

We never returned to Libya again. Ten years later the Gaddafi family were ousted in a bloody uprising, the Colonel shot dead in the street.

WHAT MAKES A EUROPEAN?

LIVING WITH YOUR ENEMY

A week after our return from Libya, the Madrid bombing came as a reminder of 9.11, and raised the spectre of perpetual terrorism, coming closer to home everywhere. This atrocity further hardened divisions in the West between those who put their faith in armed conflict leading to a decisive victory of ‘good’ over ‘evil’, and those who advocated a peaceful approach of integrating moderates from all world communities: a strategy which aimed to neutralize extremists.

Shortly after the Madrid bombing, a series of violent provocations from both sides between Muslim Albanians and Orthodox Serbs in Kosovo led to massacres and burnings of ancient mosques and churches, reminiscent of the Bosnia War. The international community rung its hands and sent more troops to keep the peace between both sides. The Kosovo Albanians wanted revenge for Serb attacks and massacres in 1999, and pressed for independence. The Serb minority, protected from attacks in enclaves by soldiers of KFOR, the Kosovo equivalent of SFOR, the Stabilization Force set up by NATO in Bosnia. KFOR consisted of conscripts from

across Europe. Politicians continued to speak about the benefits of segregated communities and partition but were forced to acknowledge the dangers of civil war which such policies encouraged. They remained unprepared for the more problematic solution of integration which encouraged former enemies to live together without fighting: the way they had done most of the time for centuries. Used to military solutions, politicians could not deal with this peaceful alternative even though it promised a better solution than a perpetual cycle of retribution down the generations. When the human race decides finally that war is not the answer, then there will be an opportunity to learn how to deal with alternative processes.

Meanwhile, on the streets of European cities, there is widespread suspicion between Muslims and non-Muslims. Anyone could be a terrorist. A young Muslim joked recently about the ease of finding double seats all to himself on public transport. Even in crowded buses people refuse to sit next to him. If they might be tempted, he fiddles suspiciously with his backpack and so keeps the space free. The bitter humour barely disguises a perilously fragile lack of trust.

In *The Son*, a stark Belgian film by the Dardenne brothers, a man discovers that the killer of his baby son, just released from a remand centre after a five year sentence, has been sent as a placement in his carpentry workshop. Such an administrative mistake can happen, and the film brings the issues of crime, punishment, redemption and forgiveness into focus. The still-grieving father, his health and marriage broken, suddenly finds himself in emotional turmoil. Conflicting desire for revenge, curiosity about the killer, a teenager who accidentally committed the crime during a botched car robbery at the age of 11, and innate feelings of decency towards his charge lead him to accept the placement. The boy, unaware his employer is the father of the boy he killed, settles quickly and learns his trade. He then asks the father to be his patron. Eventually the critical moment of discovery comes, leading to moments of fear, panic

and anger on both sides. Momentarily the father wants to strangle the boy in his charge, but can't go through with it. The film ends with the man and boy working side by side. The message is clear: human beings have to live together, even with those who have committed the worst crimes against them. What other choice is there? The man could have killed the boy in revenge and face grim consequences for the rest of his life. The boy could have fled and made some kind of life elsewhere. But the boy who had come from a broken family, abandoned by his parents, now found his niche in the workshop: a security and purpose he never experienced before in his life. He is determined to rebuild his life and make peace with the man who had become his surrogate father. The film does not deal with redemption and reconciliation. The ending is open and unsentimental. The boy gives no excuse for his crime and is without conscience. The message is therefore stark: forgiveness may be difficult if not impossible, but the fact is that we still have to live together.

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STRANGERS IN A FOREIGN LAND, HOMES AND ANCHORS

For a while, the Soul of Europe continued to explore setting up the pan-European project which started in Brussels, and ten years later would be resurrected as the Twelve Cities Network.

After the Brussels event, while Donald organized a group of Members of the European Parliament, I travelled to Duisburg to meet with the group of German women, Muslim and Christian, who were already working on a joint project: a sculpture garden along a disused railway line, now a path for cyclists, joggers, and walkers, that linked a church and the site of a planned mosque.

An evening with Sulfisiya Kaikin at her home brought back memories from over thirty years earlier.

The sparsely furnished uncluttered rooms reminded me of my aunt's flat in Stuttgart where I spent a gap-year earning money to pay for university. The flat consisted of a table to eat from, a bed to sleep in, a cupboard to store clothes and a sofa that could be turned into a bed for guests. The sparse furnishings gave the impression that things could be quickly packed for an emergency departure. My aunt had only twenty years earlier survived Auschwitz. After liberation, she made every effort to emigrate but ended up staying in Germany. For years she kept her material possessions minimal, all the easier for a rapid flight.

Sulfisiya's parents were first-generation immigrants from Turkey, 'gast-arbeiter', 'guest-workers' who were invited to help with Germany's economic recovery but not expected to stay. However, many of them settled, and their children, second generation immigrants, described themselves as German citizens. Despite a sentimental attachment to a distant unknown homeland they chose to stay in the country of their birth and education. The history of Germany's ambivalent attitudes towards minorities of different races continues. These non-ethnic Germans are allowed to stay on sufferance as second-class citizens,. Despite pride at Mesut Özil, one of Germany's best footballers, and who happens to be a second-generation Turk, Chancellor Angela Merkel still expresses contempt for a multi-cultural Germany, which she declares a 'failure'. So the threat to minorities of being uprooted, rejected and thrown out expresses itself in the provisional, temporary nature of their homes.

Sulfisiya's two small sons peered curiously into the living room where we were being served supper before they went to bed, their cute faces and large dark eyes replicating both their parents. The grandparents did not join us for supper, which they had prepared, but sat shyly on chairs by the door and watched us eating. Sulfisiya played a video of her husband singing and playing Turkish folk music in a choir.

Substantial numbers of guest workers began coming to Europe in the 1960s from former colonies: North African, mostly Algerian, to France; Indian, Pakistani and Caribbean to the UK, and Turks to Germany. Turkey had never been a colony of Germany, but relations had been politically close from before the First World War. Different skin colour meant that immigrants could not disguise their ethnicity and were easy to discriminate against.

I encountered young Turkish guest-workers during 1965, my gap year in Stuttgart when I worked with Germans who still defiantly and proudly defended their role in the Second World War. They were ashamed not of crimes committed in their name but for having lost the war. They blamed Churchill, Stalin and Hitler equally, calling them ‘gangsters’, implying that Hitler had been the least of them. I noted the often heart-stopping beauty of the guest-workers, like Sulfisiya and her husband. Why did my German colleagues hate them? Could it be jealousy, a fear of the unfamiliar, or a sense of shame at needing foreign help? These young economic migrants gathered in large crowds all night in Stuttgart’s monumental Hauptbahnhof. The station provided shelter and some warmth. Desire for company and speaking their own language drew them together, but also the need to escape from cramped lodgings which they had to share several to a room. The high rent they were forced to pay, double what my landlord charged me for my unshared room, used up most of their earnings. They tried to save money, and send it home to families who relied on them. Sulfisiya’s parents belonged to this generation. Retired guest-workers, they had become German citizens. Second generation Sulfisiya knew no other home. Turkey was a foreign country. Her German colleague Dorthe’s home, packed with the accumulation of property handed down over generations, knickknacks and mementos anchoring the space with a sense of belonging, contrasted with the homes of my aunt and Sulfisiya. These looked impermanent: temporary shelters for refugees.

After a meal of delicately spiced lentil soup and stuffed peppers, Sulfisiya's husband arrived early from work. Regular night shifts, as a lorry loader, meant he hardly saw his wife and sons. Those were the only hours the firm made available for him. Despite having a good university degree he could only find temporary insecure menial labour: street cleaning, refuse collecting and loading. These were jobs no one else wanted. Eyes shining with delight and pride at seeing us in his home, he picked up a flat zither-like instrument, and, plucking expertly, began to sing one Turkish song after the other, all mournful with wailing cadenzas.

As a young man I travelled to foreign countries looking for work. In Israel they assigned me the least popular job, collecting rubbish and disposing of it in a pit outside the kibbutz. A large coarse man called Moyshe drove the tractor, and grinned at me, a skinny callow boy just out of school, shovelling smelly mounds of indeterminate material. He then laughed boisterously as I trembled with fear at slipping into the large pit where snakes and rats lurked. Eventually the kibbutz promoted me to electrician's assistant with Motek, Hebrew for darling. A tall lean survivor from Buchenwald, he became my surrogate father and taught me how to repair gadgets, hair-dryers, toasters, cookers, lamps and radios. He never talked about his experiences in the concentration camp, but Motek's mournful eyes spoke volumes. Once I dared ask him how he felt living in a kibbutz, a settlement completely surrounded by high barbed wire fence. He shuddered. This place may have welcomed and needed him, the nickname indicating his popularity, but the past would never let him go. Years later I met another survivor like Motek, this time from a killing camp in Bosnia. Mirsad had been tortured to within an inch of his life during the 1992 war in the notorious 'white house' at the Omarska iron-ore mine. A Serb friend took pity on the seventeen year old Mirsad, hid him in a lorry, then drove to the border between Bosnia and Croatia and dropped him off saying: 'Go! Don't come back!' Mirsad fled

to Germany where he managed to find work. He returned after the war, married, moved back into the family farm, and his wife bore him two sons. Both survivors, Mirsad and Motek, shared the same calm temperament and were loved leaders of their communities. But their eyes expressed a wound that would never heal.

In 1965, after Israel and during the second of my gap years, this time in Germany, I took a poorly paid temporary job in a small factory making portable radios. The Turkish guest workers were shunted down to the windowless cellar to prepare the chassis. Being a white European I sat upstairs with the mainly female staff to assemble the radios. The boss, an injured war veteran, roamed the work place in a wheelchair, and kept a stern eye on all the workers. He barked orders like an Obergruppenführer in a bad movie about Nazis. His perpetually drunk second-in-command slunk behind, occasionally ruffling my blonde hair and whispering with beery breath into my ear what a fine SS man I would have made.

Later I moved to the Porsche factory, which was a model of good relations between management and workers: everyone made to feel part of a creative process. The cars were built from scratch in the same large hall, so the assembly of each one could be watched to the final moment. The sleek machine exited into the hands of stars like petite Elke Sommer and the Wagnerian tenor Wolfgang Windgassen, who would visit the factory to monitor their cars' progress. The management eventually put me in charge of a group of immigrant workers. Conversations with my white German work-mates concentrated on home and leisure. I knew about their wives, children and skiing holidays. The immigrants could only talk about money worries and families in distant homes. They lived in a state of perpetual anxiety. The two groups never mixed; the barrier between them as wide as the distance between their countries.

The film-maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder crossed this barrier and examined these toxic issues in *Fear Eats the Soul*. The film tells the story of a love which smashes

several taboos: most significantly of race and age. *Fear Eats the Soul* reworks an earlier film, *All That Heaven Allows* by Douglas Sirk, another German director and an émigré from Nazi Germany to Hollywood. This film also shines a spotlight on the intolerance and bigotry at the core of what the Western post-war world likes to think of as ‘decent’ society. Though varnished with glossy Hollywood production values, showing off beautiful well-groomed stars to make the message palatable to a mass cinema audience, the taut direction and unblinking stare at the fetid underbelly of polite small-town society in all its unforgiving cruelty packs a punch. Decades later, it is astonishing to think that young widowed mother Jane Wyman wanting to marry her younger handsome gardener, Hollywood beefcake Rock Hudson, should have been considered a crime or sin: but these were the strict mores of the West in the affluence-motivated puritanical 1950’s. A Hollywood remake in the 1990s, *Far From Heaven* directed by Todd Haynes, turned hunky white Rock Hudson into a black actor, a factor which would have made the affair a more serious transgression, adding racism to the issues of class and ageism. The two films reveal society’s hypocrisy and vengefulness, made nastier by sweet knowing smiles delivering the message that ‘it is all for your own good’. It is the widow’s children in both Sirk’s and Fassbinder’s film who provide the killer punches, echoing King Lear’s assertion about how much ‘sharper than a serpent’s tooth’ is the cruelty of a child’s ingratitude. The widow in Sirk’s *All That Heaven Allows*, sees through the behaviour of her so-called friends, and puts up a feisty resistance; but she cannot resist the psychological pressure from her son and daughter, who are self-obsessed and do not care for her feelings. Jane Wyman renounces her love. The political message of the film comes through Sirk’s analysis of the children’s attitudes. The son is a polished representative of competitive schooling, and his success will take him abroad to a materially rewarding career, far from his mother, to whom he will write occasional letters and eventually put in an old

people's home. The comfortably secure independence of the daughter encourages narcissism. To her credit she does eventually acknowledge in what is an emotional high point of the film that her self-absorption blinded her to the mother having a life and emotional needs of her own. The bleakest scene in Sirk's film shows the children wheeling in a large wrapped Christmas present for their mother. It turns out to be a television to cheer her lonely evenings in the future. Jane Wyman catches her ghostly reflection in the grey blank TV screen: she sees herself as already dead. Sirk's film still shocks with its analysis of family disintegration in the post-war world, and the way materialistic competitiveness causes human dysfunction.

When asked about the ambiguous meaning of the film's title, *All That Heaven Allows*, Sirk answered: 'Heaven is stingy.'

Fassbinder's take on the same theme, *Fear Eats the Soul*, turns Douglas Sirk's handsome white gardener who is also a transcendentalist inspired by Thoreau's *Walden*, into an uneducated Moroccan immigrant. In the earlier Hollywood film elegant Jane Wyman is barely middle-aged, but in Fassbinder's version, Brigitte Mira, a star of Germany films from the pre-war era, is a dowdy older woman, a cleaner on the brink of retirement. The unlikely affair between her and El Hedi Ben Salem, two lonely souls in 1970s Germany, provokes the cruelty of workmates and family, as it does in Sirk's film, though without the latter's polite hypocritical smiles.

In *Far From Heaven*, Todd Haynes' 2002 remake of *All That Heaven Allows*, the subtle emphasis in the altered title, indicating the director's pessimism, returns to the well-groomed look of Sirk's film, and takes it beyond a critique of 1950s social values into the issues of race and sexuality: Julianne Moore is younger and more beautiful than Jane Wyman, though both are equally poised and sympathetic. In *Far From Heaven* she is however not a widow. Adding another taboo to the story, her husband is a closeted gay and therefore unable to fulfil his wife's emotional and sexual needs

This imposes a different kind of loneliness. Fassbinder's 1970s free reworking of *All That Heaven Allows* added the politics of immigration to race.

The seeds of these contentious matters were planted in those paranoid post-war decades of repression, conformity and selfishness. Suspicion of the 'other', persecution of minorities, witch hunts against dissenters and political critics of the system led to ever hardening rigidity of social conventions which posited the nuclear family as the only acceptable model: the norm. Meanwhile the Cold War and the nuclear race fed further paranoia. Aggressive foreign policy pushed conflict into areas of proxy wars far from home. The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York shocked because the wars had been 'brought home'.

Paranoia fuels mistrust between partners, and jealousy between and within the sexes. Themes of independent women and war-damaged men were the stuff of Film Noir, a cinema that thrived in the immediate post-war years, and explores the shadow side of brightly-lit and relentlessly cheerful mainstream Hollywood fare which pushed those issues under a thick-pile carpet of pressure to conform, sweetening that oppression with sentimentality. Sirk knew how to manipulate the tropes of commercial film-making subversively. His films use Hollywood production values, sleek as a Porsche, to shine a spotlight on the destructiveness of a society determined to control and suppress human urges that threaten to transgress what is considered 'normal'. With less glamour Fassbinder's style subverts the soap opera genre by focusing on society's strategies to force conformity and to show the desperation of lives blighted by them. However hard people try to create 'normal' lives for themselves, urges, violence, hatred and jealousy disrupt and cause chaos.

When El Hedi Ben Salem in *Fear Eats the Soul* tries to buy food at a local grocer the shopkeeper resents serving the immigrant and for several excruciating minutes keeps giving him the wrong brand while pretending not to understand the problem. This

trivial moment distils the xenophobia as expressed by the majority of white Germans towards the 'gast-arbeiter'. Fassbinder makes the point that truth is revealed in these petty gestures and behaviour. The patience of the immigrant who heroically controls his anger contrasts with the blatant nastiness of the resentful xenophobe. The victim, as so often, displays more humanity than the aggressor.

Fassbinder's film seethes with fury at the injustices we still witness today all over Europe, where an underclass of immigrant workers tries to accommodate itself to a society which pays little attention to their human rights. This insecurity is expressed by the young Moroccan pouring his heart out to the old woman with the words that give the film its title: 'Angst Fressen Seele auf', 'fear eats the soul'.

To satisfy Hollywood's demand for a 'happy ending' Sirk's film ends with a carefully staged image: a saccharine Christmas card. It can be taken at face value. But it is a subversive comment on a society so hell-bent on repression that it drains the imagination of all who live in it. Fassbinder dispenses with any happy ending, giving his film two bitter postscripts that add a political and social dimension to the private pain. Sirk indicates that individuals can make choices to change their lives, and must find the courage to do so. Fassbinder is more cynical. He sees hypocrisy and cruelty as being endemic in human nature. When Brigitta Mira's character returns to cleaning-work she finds grudging acceptance among her peers, and immediately joins them in cold-shouldering a new worker who happens to be a foreigner. Fassbinder films the new girl imprisoned by the banister railings, her sad eyes aware of the contempt felt by Mira and the others. The second tragic postscript concerns El Hedi Ben Salem. The young Moroccan suffers a seizure and ends up in a coma, possibly to die in hospital. He has fallen victim to the common immigrant illness caused by stress: the fear that eats the soul and destroys the body.

Fear eats the souls and bodies of millions of people trying to survive in Europe today. Of the many strategies of immigration, one of the most common I come across is young men and women turning to prostitution. Clients take advantage of these people's youth, good looks, exoticism and neediness. Occasionally they become sponsors and partners to help these youngsters migrate to the West. If they are lucky, some migrants succeed in finding loving and sympathetic partners who are willing to share home and give work. The youngsters then gain citizenship and passports.

This rarely means the end of their problems.

Anar, a thirty year old pianist from Baku, was completing his musical studies in Istanbul when I met him. Gym-fit and darkly handsome, he aimed to find a sponsor, a rich older man from Western Europe who could offer him home and marriage. Anar could not return home where his family had disowned him for being gay, and cried himself to sleep every night out of anxiety. Eventually he met a wealthy German and moved to Stuttgart, where, after several stressful years of keeping his handsome trophy waiting, the German eventually filled out all the necessary forms which allowed Anar the security of European citizenship. The German turned out to be bipolar. Added to extreme mood swings, he became controlling. Having paid for him, as it were, the German considered Anar to be his possession. When I visited Anar in Stuttgart, we sat in the bleak concourse of the main station where he spent the whole time complaining about the stressful relationship that made his life a misery. At one point in our conversation he disappeared for an hour, saying he needed to see someone. I assumed he was working as an escort, a chance to earn pocket-money denied him by his controlling and jealous German partner.

Ten years after his move to Stuttgart, Anar now feels so lonely and unhappy in Germany that he plans to return to Baku, the place he fled to build a better life in Europe. This gay man talks of finding a wife and starting a family back in Azerbaijan.

This story is repeated with small variations. Some like Aron in Zagreb, and Mehmed in Sarajevo, are recounted elsewhere in this book. They raise the question: what makes a European? People from the developing world, what had formally been part of European empires, try to find work and security in Europe. They risk drowning by sea. Many die in wretched conditions. Even when they manage to arrive, they fall victim to unscrupulous gangs and entrepreneurs. The deaths of Chinese cockle-pickers on Morecombe Sands, and immigrants choking to death trapped in cargo containers while being ferried illegally into the United Kingdom, briefly compel guilty sympathetic attention. After a few days of hand-ringing, the issue of illegal aliens swamping the country returns to being political fodder, nourishing bigotry and xenophobia.

What makes a European? My father's side of the family came from Eastern Europe, Poland probably, maybe even further East; my mother's side many generations earlier from Spain. Long before that, my antecedents were part of the Jewish diaspora from the Middle East. Anthropology theorizes that we all originated in Africa. Scriptural imagination creates Adam and Eve male and female progenitors from whom all people of every race and colour are descended. From the beginning there was discord. Cain and Abel fought over parental approval. Biblical stories try to confront the issues of conflict between tribes, questioning why groups and communities keep fighting each other. The story of the Tower of Babel explains our differences as an act of God who punishes humans for their arrogance in thinking they can control the universe, being equal with God. The verse on Ta'aruf in the Koran suggests that God created difference specifically so people could come to know each other.

Nations in the West have become so mixed that these differences should scarcely matter. However, international commerce and the internet are turning the world into a global village. Getting to know one another has never been easier. But economics and

politics, fuelled by international markets, encourage perpetual conflict, proxy wars dressed up as civil wars, nourished by manipulated ethnic hatreds and religious differences.

Despite gestures of contrition, memorials and films that acknowledge man's murderously destructive nature there persists a resistance to reflect on the causes of genocide. War remains the favoured option for people to solve disputes, and express mutual hatred in perpetual cycles of vendetta rather than exploring different ways of coexisting that would ease suffering. On the one hand people express a longing for peace and being able to raise families and lead lives of achievement in security. On the other hand there is pride among perpetrators. From the concentration camps of Central Europe to those in Bosnia and the massacres in Indonesia, these perpetrators declare their crimes to be necessary. Moreover they demand sympathy for the traumas they suffer while committing atrocities.

PATHS OF WISDOM

The German contemporary artist Anselm Kiefer's *Wege der Weisheit (Paths of Wisdom)* in the Tate Modern depicts, in neat rows, woodcut portraits of men throughout history, imitating the renaissance style of Albrecht Dürer. But all are defaced with scrawled motifs, and those round a hole at the centre of the painting are charred, as though the picture had been pulled from a bonfire. This work of art is a reflection on culture and vandalism. The severe expressions on these male faces oppress us, as though we are at school being lectured by patriarchal teachers. The woodcut style provides a reassuring veneer of culture, and also commerce. The point of woodcuts was to make art cheaply available to a mass market. Dürer managed this so successfully that he became one of the wealthiest and most highly regarded artists of his time. But what is the significance of Anselm Kiefer's *Paths of Wisdom's*

charred centre? One of the Third Reich's first political and cultural acts, nationally, was to burn the books of non-Aryan writers, specifically Jewish ones, and to stage exhibitions of what it described as 'degenerate art', paintings and sculptures of which the Nazis disapproved. The Jewish poet Heinrich Heine prophesied a century before the Holocaust: beware the burning of books, because the burning of people will follow. The fire at the centre of Kiefer's painting threatens to consume all the men portrayed in it. It suggests the futility of rescuing a work of art that is irretrievably defaced. The defacement is however the point of Kiefer's painting. To destroy one's own work of art is an act of self-mutilation. I have practised this myself at times of crisis, self-doubt and as a form of adolescent protest. However I resisted defacement when commissioned in 1988 to paint two banners on the theme of the Apocalypse for the Antoniterkirche in Köln. I intended the thought behind the images to last for more than a single viewing. The pastor who commissioned the banners wanted to stage their public burning. The destruction would have made the pictures newsworthy. Perhaps we could have gone half-way and, like Kiefer, simply burnt a hole in them. Kiefer's mutilation of his painting challenges response and invites dialogue on issues that have historical and social as well as personal resonance.

The subtitle of *Paths of Wisdom* is *Hermannschlacht, The Hermann Massacre*, refers to the German warrior Arminius, Latin for Hermann, who defeated the Roman army in the Teutoberg Forest in the 2nd century AD. This victory became a defining myth of German military superiority. The Germans led by Arminius laid an ambush for an invading Roman legion of soldiers, pounced and massacred every last one. The ruthlessness of the attack, its efficiency and totality, became the hallmarks of German warfare which reached its apogee in the two world wars of the 20th century.

Kiefer's painting does not illustrate the event in the manner of say Grünewald's *Battle of the Issus*, which in monumental detail depicts two armies, the Greeks under

Alexander the Great and the Persians, clashing under a dramatically stormy sky. Nor is Kiefer illustrating Heinrich von Kleist's play, *Hermannschlacht*, which also celebrates war. The faces which stare severely at us from Kiefer's woodcuts are the good and the great of German culture and politics for whom the Hermann Massacre represented a heroic and inspiring act. The picture therefore poses a question: how do we interpret our history and the myths which form us? That a massacre, whether it be a victory like the Hermann Massacre or a defeat for the Serbs in the Battle for Kosovo, can in both cases be viewed as a source of national pride raises questions about the trajectory of a nation's sense of its history and future. The slow burn at the centre of Anselm Kiefer's picture indicates how the predominantly male preoccupation with massacre leads inevitably to further massacres until the culture of a nation itself becomes consumed and destroyed by them. 1945 witnessed the end of a war so total in its destructiveness that many hoped it would never be repeated, at least not in Europe: hence the founding of the European Union. However, the faces of all these 'wise', honoured and admired thinkers appear to be blessing a myth which treats massacre as a heroic act.

It is important to remember that the Holocaust was abetted with considerable enthusiasm by most of the countries in German-occupied Europe. It represented the logical conclusion to centuries of anti-Semitism and hatred of minorities. Generations of German thinkers and artists may have decried the crude bigotry that became endemic in all parts of society. Nietzsche, who indirectly inspired the Nazi myth of the 'superman', expressed disgust at the crude stupidity of anti-Semitism. None of these thinkers and artists prevented bigotry's progress to the Holocaust. How could the most influential minds of their age not have any influence to prevent it?

It is not simply a matter of stopping the juggernaut, but of more effectively countering those myths and beliefs which fuel international, inter-communal, inter-

religious, and inter-racial hatreds. This is the challenge of Anselm Kiefer's *Paths of Wisdom*. The picture suggests that paths of wisdom actually lead to the Holocaust. These distinguished and thoughtful countenances looking out of the woodcuts appear smug in their eminence; they express all the confidence of high intellect and success in their fields, but we the viewers know the end result of their thinking, and see the smouldering fire already engulfing them.

HEROS AND DRAGONS

One of the cornerstone figures in German culture would have approved of the Holocaust. When Wagner heard about a synagogue burning down in Vienna killing the congregation inside, he commented that this might be the best solution for getting rid of Jews. His work, now perpetually linked to Nazi ideology, expresses both a glorification and a critique of that philosophy. As with the Bible, different and extreme interpretations can be elicited from systems of belief, narrowing and distorting their vision, ignoring the poetry that crosses boundaries and eliminating the imagination, so creating repressive ideologies. Major artworks of which Wagner's operas are significant examples are at their best leaps of the imagination, and not manifestos.

A father and daughter dominate his largest work, the *Ring of the Nibelungs*, but the drama pivots around a young man, a naïve interloper, who is manipulated by almost everyone he meets for their own ends. His death provides the climax of the whole work: a waste of a life for which the social order must be punished and destroyed. At the heart of the tetralogy is the killing of a dragon. This archetypal encounter takes place in a dark forest. It is not a battle between good and evil because both the dragon and the young man are incidental to that conflict. As yet innocent of worldly treachery, the young man is not afraid of the dragon. He expresses remorse at killing

the 'worm', an epithet that suggests its snake-like rather than fiery appearance. This slaughter prepares the way for a rite of passage during which the young man fights his grandfather and smashes the phallic spear the old man uses to bar his way. The forces of male ambition and struggle for world domination are represented by this godlike grandfather and his dwarfish rival, described as 'light' and 'dark' spirits although morally-speaking they are both interchangeable. They meet outside the dragon's cave, waiting to see the outcome of its encounter with the young man, a clash for which they have spent years preparing.

After he has killed both the dragon and his treacherous stepfather, who had also been manipulating this encounter for his own ends, the young man collapses in exhaustion under a lime tree in the forest. Body and face smeared with the blood of his victims, and surrounded by the calm and beauty of nature he contemplates his loneliness. He is then driven on by awakening sexual urges. Wagner broke off composition at this point, preferring to leave his young killer lying under the lime tree before moving him from the relative safety of the forest into the world of devious people. These will also manipulate him for their ends. He has not a hope of survival.

Wagner originally intended to write one opera about this young man, calling it *Siegfried's Death*. But the composer, who was also a theoretician and philosopher, came to realize the importance of understanding the past, the history, the 'mistakes, crimes and follies' which explain how the young man came to be manipulated, turned into a murderer and why he was killed. The subsequent extension of the music drama into a tetralogy turned a spotlight on the killer's grandfather and his favourite daughter. The grandfather's arrogance, broken promises and machinations involving his daughter turn both into the main characters. Their tempestuous relationship drives the plot. The grandfather is a template for all world leaders who think their tyrannical behaviour renders them unassailable when in fact it brings about their downfall and in

the case of this particular work of art the destruction of the whole world:

Götterdämmerung. The fact that he is full of remorse, painfully aware of his failing turns the grandfather into a tragic and sympathetic figure. The final conflagration is sparked by the self-immolation of his daughter who in her own words has 'become wise' from her own and her father's errors. She hopes by her sacrifice to cleanse the world for a new beginning.

The circular structure of the drama provides a satisfying sense of organic justice: Mother Nature all-embracing and eternal. The vanity of brief human rivalries and ambitions are put into perspective. The soaring melody that accompanies the final cataclysm of fire and water recalls the redemptive triumph of love, not of desire but the love of a mother for her unborn child. This happened in the second opera of the tetralogy when the woman in an adulterous and incestuous relationship sees her lover killed, wants to die but is told of the baby in her womb: the 'Pfand', the pledge from the dead man. In a sudden outburst of euphoria she hurls this melody at full throttle across the orchestra and audience before fleeing into the forest to protect her unborn child. It is a moment that echoes folk tales in all cultures about women who have dared to cross boundaries that male societies impose on them. This transgression condemns the women to live in the wilderness or a forest, eating roots and berries. By persistence and keeping true to themselves, they survive all kinds of trials and eventually achieve fulfilment even if at the cost of their lives. Hope lies in nature and the basic human qualities of love and endurance.

The bulk of Wagner's drama focuses on the violent consequences of men's desire to control each other and their environment. The result is always war, the murder of innocents and destruction of homes and communities. This lesson from history is repeated ceaselessly over the centuries and millennia and remains unheeded. So despite the catharsis of the final conflagration at the end of Wagner's music drama,

which purges guilt and lights the flame of hope for a fresh start, the more striking climax occurs earlier: the slaughter of the young man, innocently caught up in the lethal consequences of betrayals and treacheries. It is a moment in the opera when no one sings. The music describes a world convulsed in grief, violent sobs punctuated by the earth shuddering. This death is seen as a cataclysmic event, a judgement on the world.

In some performances this passage can sound like the earth convulsing not necessarily in grief, but an awakening.

POWER FRAUEN

The River Rhine, around which the action of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* takes place, flows through the industrial areas of modern Germany. For several decades after the war the river became so polluted that nature ceased to thrive in it. While attempts are made to revive the sickly waters and once again fish and plants are returning, so Germany like the rest of Europe has become more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in ways that could never have been dreamed of or tolerated at the time Wagner composed. His dramas were used politically to promote the ideal of an Aryan white-skinned, fair-haired and intellectually superior race purified of all racial and cultural pollution.

Nature is diverse and requires ecological interdependence; similarly human diversity in the new mix of communities is beginning to create a fresh flourishing of European culture liberated from petty nationalisms that bred repetitive conflicts in the past. The Rhine flows through the city of Duisburg. Its banks are flanked by Thyssen factories. I sat with the group of Muslim and Christian women there, and we discussed a future where all races and faiths were equal and included. Fears, mistrust and mean-spirited hatreds persisted in the city where the large percentage of Turkish immigrant

Muslims, higher than in any other German city, had earned Duisburg the derogatory nickname of Istanbul on the Rhine.

Dorthe, the woman Lutheran pastor, spoke of being cold-shouldered and blanked in the street by parishioners. She challenged them and they complained that she 'spent too much time with Muslims'. 'But why can't I speak to Muslims?' she asked them. They had no reply, just that it was wrong. This sourness indicated that the hatred and contempt that ruined lives in Fassbinder's 1970s film *Fear Eats the Soul* still thrives in Germany. The fear also infects those trying to create bonds between communities. The same factually-wrong arguments underpin the prejudice and suspicion in Germany, as in England, that foreigners are taking jobs, money, houses and privileges away from those who have always lived there. However, this new generation of aliens who appear to be taking over the country have been born in Germany, as in England, France and elsewhere in European countries. They see themselves as German, English, French as well as being European, even when they keep faith with their ethnic and religious roots.

The Christian and Muslim mothers making up the group of Duisburg women sat in a circle enjoyed this opportunity to be together. Their bright-eyed children played in the corner, scrawling artwork with a girl minder but occasionally scurrying over to be part of the group where exciting things seemed to be talked about. If they weren't immediately picked up and cuddled they burst into tears. Sulfisiya's cute youngest son, Edin, enjoyed a special bond with Dorthe's equally cute, sprightly, pixie-like daughter Juliane.

The group had its stresses. One of the Muslim mothers turned out to be a convert. She alone wore a hijab. Her husband practised a strict form of Islam, unlike the husbands of the other Muslim mothers who chose to be secular and assimilated into a European way of life. The arguments about religious observation tended to be

between the Muslim mothers. They focused on conflicting demands and influences of secular and religious life. Sulfisiya, dressed fashionably in western style, argued fiercely with the convert who was the most rigidly dogmatic of all the mothers in the group. But mutual respect meant the arguments could be frank and fiercely debated while not being destructive of the group. All of them knew that their staying and working together in itself represented a pioneering achievement. If these positive-minded mothers could not cooperate, what chance had the rest of society? The group had a reputation of being ‘power Frauen’, proud of their pioneering work. ‘We have nothing to apologize for,’ they declared. The community of Duisburg had been suspicious of the group long before 9:11.

‘This group is my anchor,’ announced Dorthe. She referred to her work as a pastor, with the pull of demands on her time and energy from home, family and parish. She found her greatest support came from the one area of her work which the parish found most difficult to accept: hosting the group of Muslim and Christian women. Dorthe talked about the religious teaching of particular importance to her: that it is in the stranger we find our friend. This comes early in the Bible, a text precious to Jews, Christians and Muslims, when Abraham entertains three strangers who turn out to be God and his angels. It is through sharing food and the basic elements of human hospitality that the deepest connections are made between people. This is how Dorthe saw the group of Duisburg women.

They all agreed with her and, to welcome us, had pooled meagre finances to prepare a feast which we spent the evening sharing. To us this gathering represented a defining moment in the story of the Soul of Europe: an example of how the world should be and what we were striving for.

The group was about trust and friendship with an emphasis on young mothers being allowed to leave domestic chores, on the husbands being prepared to stay at home and

look after themselves so their wives could spend time together talking about issues important to them. The existence of the group was a challenge common to all communities: keeping women in their place. To strengthen cohesion within the group, the women planned a joint project to counteract a mono-cultural and mono-lingual German society which continues to have no conception of what it feels like to be seen as an alien: a *Feind*, an enemy. The women had invited an artist to create a sculpture for the group as part of a permanent outdoor exhibition along a public pathway. This used to be a railway track linking the industrial areas of the city, and now leads from the Catholic church at one end, past the Lutheran church to the site of what is now, as I write, the city's first mosque. The group called the project a Dialogue of Sculpture, meant to symbolise the connections between the diverse communities of Duisburg.

Sulfisiya had guided us along this path earlier that day. Through a winter blizzard we looked at several other projects, already completed, and trudged through mud and snow to where the group's own sculpture would stand.

Yildirim, the artist in charge of the Dialogue of Sculpture project, attended the evening meeting. The women laughingly introduced this friendly avuncular man not so much as their token male, but as an 'honorary' woman. He brought designs for them to discuss. After the meal, he picked up the zither-like instrument like the one Sulfisiya's husband had played two nights before, and sang one Turkish song after the other. The women beamed.

We offered to be advocates for the group, promising to inform people all over Europe about the sculpture garden, to explain what the women were achieving, and to describe how they worked together. 'The process is as important as building the mosque,' Donald told them.

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Next day, Sulfisiya and Dorthe took advantage of our presence in Duisburg by introducing us to sceptical members of the local council, municipality, church, and mosque communities. We provided proof that their projects were now known beyond the city, beyond Germany, and throughout the rest of Europe. These sceptical males quickly grasped the commercial value of the project's international dimension: good for Duisburg.

TRADITIONAL MALES AND POWER FRAUEN

The bigotry of these councillors, civil servants and church administrators, all male, shocked us. The Duisburg women's groups turned out to be more pioneering and revolutionary than we realized during our first meeting. This kind of gathering across communities and faiths seemed to be natural and self-evidently useful. The men looked on these women with at best patronising sympathy, but mostly with suspicion. They were threatened by Sulfisiya and Dorthe's force of character and intelligence. At first these male directors and politicians sat in silence while I spoke about the Soul of Europe and our involvement with their group, the aims of the Brussels Consultation and our plans for a European network of similar groups. The men stared at me, another man, amazed that I had anything to do with these 'crazy' women, and moreover that I spoke so enthusiastically about their work. I had assumed these officials were supporting the women. This assumption had the effect of helping the men overcome the hurdle of bigotry. I was not trying to argue the women's case or persuade the men to take the project seriously. Without realizing my mistake I congratulated the men on the wisdom of their support and generosity, so when I finished speaking they could do nothing other than agree. Sulfisiya and Dorthe were delighted and planned to take matters further by organizing a large civic event in

Duisburg attended by other network groups from the Brussels Consultation: a follow-up.

The director of the Development Organization of Duisburg, which had so far been half-heartedly supporting the Dialogue of Sculpture project, came out with all the right words: ‘dealing with problems’, ‘quality of people’, ‘good for trust’, ‘help overcome unemployment and poverty’, ‘the right time’, ‘bigger issues at stake’, ‘different histories’, ‘affecting all social groups’, etc... He proudly told us that he had nominated Sulfisiya for a special civic prize, which was conferred on her at the local synagogue. Sulfisiya spoke about her family and friends being present, meeting as ‘human beings’ regardless of racial and religious differences. She described how the synagogue in Duisburg stood for the presence of Jews in a country, which had recently tried to remove them. The mosque represented a new community which had become a permanent feature of German life. There remained an awareness that a similar holocaust could be visited on this community.

With an eye on catching votes the director seized on the prospect of Duisburg hosting a network event, and observed that this would help with ongoing political problems surrounding the building of the mosque. German Catholics in particular were fearful of the ‘shock of the new’.

He then turned into a dinosaur by reminding Sulfisiya how lucky she was to have a husband who allowed her to do all this work besides fulfilling her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. He meant it as a joke, but the assumptions behind the observation shocked me into silence. Had he even met her husband? Myths of Muslim male oppression of women died hard in the UK as well as in Germany.

Sulfisiya grimaced, used to this kind of banter, while Dorte seethed. Impervious to their feelings, the director, a left wing Social Democrat, was more concerned with not

losing votes to a German public turning to the right. If the women's project put Duisburg on the map it would help his chances of re-election.

Dorthe's boss, a minister, also looked bemused at my advocacy for the women. I congratulated the deacon on his farsightedness in enthusiastically supporting the group. This came as a surprise to him. He had done so only grudgingly, considering Dorthe to be a wild card, someone to be monitored carefully and restrained if necessary.

He responded to my words of praise with a slight and patronising smile: 'We do support the initiative, but some churches have reservations. There are coalitions of faith in the community, but in Marxlohe there are extreme political positions. We have to keep it local.' Marxlohe was the Muslim district of Duisburg where Sulfisiya planned to erect the mosque. As in similar cities in the UK with sizeable Muslim populations, members of far-right working class groups lived alongside, protesting perpetually at the presence of 'unwelcome aliens', and harassing them.

The director explained to me that the Ruhr had been predominantly Evangelical Lutheran until the end of the Second World War. Then refugees fleeing the formerly German Silesia region of Poland settled in Duisburg and made the city 30% Catholic. Now the population was evenly divided between Catholics, Lutherans and Muslims.

In the manner of all administrators, he advocated moving slowly and cautiously. Issues such as the call of the muezzin had to be dealt with alongside the ringing of church bells. A compromise had been recently reached: the call being only on Fridays and the bells to chime at limited times. We did not discuss the secularisation of society in which the majority of non-believing citizens might resent having their football on television disturbed by either bell-ringing or Muslim calls to prayer.

In his novel *Before the Storm* the German writer Theodore Fontane, for most of his life a journalist, described the turning point in history when the Napoleonic expansionist invasions of European nations upset the political balance of the continent. The novel is set along the border of Germany and Poland. This was already a dividing line of cultures between West and East. A contemporary of Fontane, Tolstoy also described the Napoleonic invasion, but from an Eastern perspective in *War and Peace*. Similar revolutions and invasions were to take place in the subsequent century along the same fault lines. Today, the flow of communities across international borders makes radical changes in world cultures inevitable.

Both Fontane and Tolstoy describe the unifying characteristics of all people, what they have in common: their physical and emotional needs rather than national differences which are seen to be politically manipulated, geographical rather than social or cultural. As the first lines of *War and Peace* indicate, educated Russians at the time of the French invasion spoke fluent French and were steeped in French culture. Fontane's *Before the Storm* describes in meticulous detail how two aristocratic families and their respective communities on either side of the East West border sustain strong emotional and mutually interdependent relationships.

In both novels conversations between enemies are conducted in a civilized fashion, each trying to find common ground. Military engagements that politics make inevitable are shown to be a futile and tragic waste of human flesh and spirit, as well as being intolerably brutal. Tolstoy theorizes at length about changes in history being made not by individuals, demagogues like Napoleon, but by people moving en masse.

Tolstoy and Fontane were prophetic in their writings. They intended to change attitudes to war. Eventually it required two world conflicts to wake the majority of mankind up to war's futility. Their insights and warnings are still being ignored and even rejected. President Putin refused to honour Tolstoy's centenary, a snub to one of

the greatest and most influential writers who ever lived. Meanwhile each war creates another, and the vicious circle continues unchecked.

Both writers have been proved correct in their assessment of the influence of the deeper currents in social life: the movements of peoples and the upheavals at the grassroots of society. It is economic issues that have the biggest impact on world affairs. Wars are based on conflicting nationalisms and sovereignties. But boundaries between peoples are blurring. The streets of every major city in the western world display a striking diversity of race, religion and culture: a radical change that can never be reversed. The 'war on terror' which attempts to drive a wedge between Islamic and Western cultures is futile, because the feared 'alien' is already our neighbour. Aggressive political attitudes fail to reflect these demographic changes. Therefore the main global battle is economic, between the oppressor and the oppressed. The rich protect their profits from the majority when its different ideology threatens the wealthy and therefore powerful minority's interests.

When Professor Fukuyama writes about the 'end of history' in response to the collapse of communism,, he does not mean that events cease to happen and to influence world affairs, but that the traditional clash of ideologies which used to shape international conflicts no longer applies. He assumes that the whole world aspires to a liberal, capitalist, free-market economy. Subsequent events, including most dramatically 9:11 and then the collapse of the banking system, cast doubts on this thesis. Not everyone in the world shares the aspiration of neo-liberalism, which is based on principles of inevitable divisions between rich and poor. Success depends on a minority of winners and a majority of losers. This dogma which underpins the market is as unquestioned as the most rigidly followed tenets of religious faith.

Professor Huntington, another neo-liberal political theorist, has raised the spectre of a new world war even more apocalyptic than the ones in the 20th century, if that were

possible: a ‘clash of culture’ between Islam and the West activated by fundamentalist Islam and resisted by fundamentalist, Christian neo-liberal capitalism.

These theories are causing anxiety in the Muslim world because the theories assume a consensus which has yet to be proved. They pre-emptively pit the present dominant world power against its presumed enemies, without discussion or negotiation. Each side claims sole right to the position of right and wrong in terms of good and evil. This claim justifies perpetual conflict.

Sulfisiya showed us the site of the new mosque in the Marxlohe district of Duisburg. As overall manager of the large-scale project, she kept a sharp eye on it fulfilling both a social and religious purpose: to be an educational centre for everyone, not just Muslims, as well as a place of worship. It would provide a point of local interest, a cultural centre in a poor part of the city, where the streets were lined with rows of drab flats. The flat and non-descript site reminded us of the space in Banja Luka where the Ferhadija Mosque had once stood. For the present it could have been a car park or a children’s playground.

Seasonal sleet drove us to take shelter in a temporary hut situated by a pile of dirt. A group of old unemployed men inside the hut were drinking mint tea out of small glasses and watching Turkish soap operas on a television fixed to the wall. A couple of slender, dark-eyed young men with elaborately spiky, greased and part-dyed haircuts served the tea. We sat in the warm fug and learned the custom of placing spoons on top of the cup to indicate a refill, or for it to be taken away.

Sulfisiya continued to explain the mosque’s purpose beyond being a place of worship. The visitors centre would be open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike for socialising, education and exhibitions. Bearing in mind that women were traditionally excluded from the main space of prayer, the centre must contain an area set apart for

women to meet. At the same time as raising money from local people, negotiating support from the state, local authorities and Muslim businesses, Sulfisiya set out a three year plan for the mosque. Her determination impressed the politicians we met, but also provoked their dubious observations about her ‘understanding’ husband. Saban worked unsocial hours to support his wife’s activities, and when not catching up on sleep and enjoying rare moments with his sons he nourished his spirits by joining a local music group to perform Turkish songs. The persistence of these people, even in the most straightened circumstances, showed up the superficial attitudes of those in authority. Here lay the deeper purpose behind the mosque: to be not just a place of worship for the growing numbers of Muslims settled in Duisburg, but to give the community their culture and self respect beyond mere survival. A liberated woman with a secular scepticism about religious teachings, Sulfisiya explained the significance of the mosque straightforwardly: ‘We are German. We are Muslim. We are proud of where we come from and who we are. You have the right to disagree with us, but we demand the right to your respect and that you permit us to build our mosque.’

These words chimed with the Soul of Europe’s objectives: to go beyond grudging tolerance, to achieve justice, so making it possible for people to live together inclusively with diversity and respectful of each others differences. A well educated and qualified young man from Turkey, Sulfisiya’s husband Saban, described his attempts at finding a job. Only managing to land a night shift loading goods he observed how a mono-cultural and mono-lingual Germany had no notion of what it was like to be seen as an ‘alien,’ an enemy, ‘Feind’.

When my father arrived in England as a refugee and war broke out, he was interned as a ‘friendly alien’, a translation of the German ‘freundlicher Feind’, ‘friendly enemy’. This paradox always had my aunt choking with laughter. The label could

easily come out as 'feindlicher Freund', 'hostile friend'. Then, as now, the difference between 'alien' and 'enemy' was fudged. Captured German soldiers, conscripts who were serving their country, perhaps unwilling but obedient accomplices in Hitler's adventure, were technically the enemy. After capture, they became like everyone else, and a number of these German soldiers settled in England, married English women, raised families and became British citizens.

The new 'aliens' across Europe have not come as enemies, or even as 'hostile friends', but are useful and essential members of the work force and society. Yet they are still seen as alien, dangerous and arousing suspicion. The war on terror accentuates this fear. Although waged largely in other parts of the world, far from Europe, it has the negative effect of creating enemies at home.

The Duisburg woman's group discussed raising funds for their projects. Muslims needed to be seen as European. Money support should be in euros, not in Arabic dinars. Advocates had to be courageous. Equal representation from all communities would help, as well as securing the support of sympathetic journalists. The left-wing city council so far supported the building of the mosque; but after the upcoming elections, and in a climate of growing suspicion of Muslims and a hardening of conservative political attitudes in Germany, a question mark hung over who might continue, and even whether they might stop the project. Apart from the question of strategy we needed to agree we are all equal.

Dorthe and Sulfisiya had enough determination to deal with obstacles to the project. The group had access to the facilities of the Lutheran church, but the next pastor night not be so accommodating. Such uncertainties emphasised the fragility of these gatherings which depended on the sympathy of the host.

A few years later Dorthe did in fact change parishes with her husband and Sulfisiya became a local politician. The group changed, but the Dialogue of Sculpture remains as a significant attraction in Duisburg.

The dark tower of Cologne Cathedral with its myriad little spires, like sharp needles sticking up from the colossal stone-work, hulked outside my hotel window next to a gigantic Rolex sign in glowing red neon letters: culture and affluence in tandem. On the other side of the square a different image can be seen in the Albertus Magnus Church, that pre-dates the cathedral by several centuries. Here the medieval philosopher theologian Duns Scotus taught St Thomas Aquinas. This church celebrates the idea of community. The ancient murals, stained glass, and sculptures, depict the tools of the trades of all the craftsmen who donated funds to the church. These scissors, boots, mallets, and pincers, take precedence over the religious imagery. Uniquely, each picture reflects the particular skills of the different generations of artists from the early Middle Ages through the High Renaissance to the present day, even in the colour schemes and patterns. Usually a discrepancy of style between different ages and traditions is visible in many churches and cathedrals. For instance the late Renaissance accretions in Chartres Cathedral disturb the balance of the original concept, imposing on its spacious simplicity which would have originally allowed unbroken view of the magnificent stained glass windows. In the Albertus Magnus Church each generation of artists respects the previous ones. This shared vision of humanity creates a harmony between the various styles within a setting of warm rusty red stone. Life-size saints look down kindly on the worshippers and visitors. Even St Bartolomeo's scimitar does not threaten: he looks about to chop herbs.

In a side chapel, set aside for worship and not for tourists, the large windows are dominated by four women saints: larger than life mother-figures with small rounded breasts. Their animated gestures animate the folds of their robes, implying incessant activity. This group of power-Frauen are engaged in lively debate while carrying out everyday chores. Pots, plants, and kitchen utensils that surround them suggest domesticity and nurture. The church setting gives this conversation a metaphysical and universal significance.

The animation of these female figures, along with the abundance of domestic artefacts and nature flourishing in the background, are in striking contrast to a triptych in Cologne Cathedral on the other side of the square. The central panel of this triptych inspired one of Schumann's songs in his cycle *Dichterliebe, Poet's Love*. It depicts a delicately beautiful Madonna who shyly shows her child to the worshipping rich wise men, each weighted down with elaborately embroidered robes, jewellery and gifts. Meanwhile a group of pregnant women on the left-hand panel faces a menacing crowd of armed soldiers, spears bristling, on the right-hand panel. The triptych's meticulous design and precision of proportion, its cool perfection celebrating a global order in which affluence, power, and religion bond in the manner of the State and the Orthodox Church in present-day Russia, gives this confrontation between female passivity and male aggression a disturbingly sinister slant. The girlish Madonna, depicted as an idealized beauty, is hemmed in, threatened and oppressed by the rich old men and soldiers. The vigorously animated women saints in the Albertus Magnus Church engage robustly on issues including and beyond their allotted tasks of motherhood and home. Men are strikingly absent from these images; probably fighting wars in another place away from home.

The renaissance women in the Albertus Magnus Church reminded me of the power Frauen of Duisburg. They engage in discussion while stewarding home and the

environment. Children play. Food is being prepared and served. The Duisburg women engage creatively with the present and direct the future positively. Meanwhile the men in authority are suspicious of them, patronise and seek to control and oppress them.

The debating women of the Albertus Magnus Church are also listening to each other. The movement of their bodies suggests communication and mutuality, which has the effect of strengthening their self-confidence and individuality while the group remains tight-knit. They sustain each other as equals, like the women of Duisburg.

Dorthe repeated: ‘This group is my anchor.’

A WILDGOOSE CHASE: MILLI GORUS

Milli Gorus, a Turkish organization with branches in Germany, had promised financial support for the Ferhadija Project. Assuming we knew about their activities, the director Oguz Ocuncu sent us no literature but wrote several times, inviting us to pay a visit.

A taxi took us to an industrial estate where large warehouses covered acres of ground. No one lived there. Each warehouse looked like the other so we could not identify which belonged to Milli Gorus. The taxidriver dropped us off in the middle of this storage depot wasteland then drove off at high. After walking down several long drives checking different warehouses we eventually reached one where we saw Turkish faces peering out of a window at us.

Milli Gorus represents Muslim communities across Europe, advocating their rights and equalities with a particular concern for the integration of Islam into Europe: building mosques, establishing centres of religious and cultural education, advocating the right to wear veils, and other issues. At the time of our visit, the society covered fifteen regions in Germany alone, fifteen in other parts of Europe, and supported over five hundred mosques. The organization received funding from these communities. It

looked after their interests, everything from marriages, funerals, prayers and services, language courses, youth and women activities, pilgrimages, teaching and leisure activities.

Inside the warehouse which housed the administrative centre of Milli Gorus, the place was decorated and furnished in extravagant style, with spacious lecture halls, exhibition areas, offices full of IT equipment, and large numbers of people working there. A massive world map stretching across the wall of one of the largest halls indicated the extent of the organization's influence.

We were used to meetings in shabby offices where individuals running underfunded NGOs expressed enthusiasm and goodwill for our work, wanting to be involved and hoping in that way to find money. Now we had to adjust to being supplicants kneeling before a powerful organization. The director welcomed us politely. A dapper, reserved man, Oguz Ucuncu assured us of support, but before releasing funds needed to have copies of Ferhadija Charitable Trust articles and memorandums of association: a process we were only beginning. He also needed further reassurance before committing Milli Gorus to giving us money. He expressed misgivings about building a mosque in Serb Banja Luka.

We had been advised to keep quiet in Turkey about our association with Milli Gorus, because its religious emphasis contradicted the secular bias of Turkish government, just as our ties with Libya's World Islamic Call Society made European governments suspicious. The Soul of Europe survived because of Libya's funding. Those critical of our connections had no interest in supporting us anyway.

Both the World Islamic Call Society and Milli Gorus looked for respectability and acceptance in secular Europe. The Soul of Europe could help them. Once they achieved this objective they had no further use for us.

This situation grew out of a history of colonial relations between Europe and the rest of the world. The situation might not be as extreme as that depicted in *The Long Firm*, a TV drama series about a business venture in Nigeria, in which British businessmen fall victim to even more ruthless and cunning scamming by the ‘natives’ themselves. In that drama series the last words of the Nigerian minister to the UK businessmen pithily sum up the third world attitude towards Great Britain: ‘Fuck off back to your tired little island before I get angry!’

Having met us Oguz Ucuncu respected our seriousness and determination, and to save us paying for another taxi summoned one of his drivers to take us back to the station. We had not expected to find such a thriving organization situated in a remote suburb miles outside Cologne. Milli Gorus which represented Muslim communities on the outskirts of towns made their base away from the city centre. Like the people they worked for they had yet to be assimilated into the heart of Europe. These ‘aliens’ still knock on the door from the outside, despite being settled and part of the society inside: second and third generations born and raised in Europe as Europeans.

HEIMAT: HOMELAND

The film-maker Edgar Reitz examines the notion of nationhood, homeland and belonging in his epic three-part series HEIMAT. The first part follows the personal histories of a particular community in rural Germany from the end of the First World War to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The second part focuses on a group of students in the 1960s, and the radical, social, sexual and political changes that grew out of that revolutionary decade. The third part follows one of the students, now a famous conductor, back to his rural community, and explores the issues that followed the collapse of communism and the ongoing migration of peoples across borders. The series concludes at the end of the millennium with a sense of foreboding.

The epic series casts an analytic eye on how Germans deal with rural and urban life, survive the collective insanity of the Third Reich and face up to the challenges of a post-war Europe, in which prioritising business, economic stability and national security comes at the cost of traditional human values such as family and community, both of which face challenges in the last half of the 20th century. Individual real-life memories within a community shape the narrative of the first part. Out of this close-knit traditional rural society emerges an artist who will dominate the next two series: an ambitious musician, no hero, whose relationships and career becomes the pivot of this epic series. His particular story and that of his fellow students in the second part of the epic series give an informative perspective to the changes that take place in the post-war years, leading to the end of the millennium. Edgar Reitz's stated intention was to kindle our own memories and help us understand history in many dimensions: social and political, cultural and economic. The title of the epic series focuses on the question: what is homeland? It begs answers that have become ever more pressing in a continent, where nationalities are blurred and people from all over the world live and feel at home.

The epic series starts out as an exploration of German attitudes to their homeland. As events such as the collapse of communism unexpectedly overtake the story in its later stages, so the series responds by examining issues of migration and global changes. At the end of the First World War the German farming community is close-knit. In the following it opens to strangers and foreigners and becomes a different society altogether by the end of the millennium. The first episode of the epic series punctures any sentimental nostalgia for a lost idyll in which an ethnically pure community lives in contented harmony. The main character is a soldier who has returned home from the trenches. Haunted by a war in which his best friend was killed, and given no opportunity to deal with what has since become known as post-traumatic stress

disorder he woos a girl who rejects him. He marries on the rebound then suddenly, without giving any reason, leaves his village, his wife and children and disappears. One day he starts walking out of the village and continues to walk never looking back or intending to return.

This departure is echoed at the start of the second part of the epic in which the artist musician also decides to leave the community which he experiences as repressive and backward, also determined not to look back or ever to return. He witnesses and takes part in the social and cultural revolutions that gave rise to the liberation movements of the 1960s, and which changed society.

Decades later, as recounted in the third part of the epic series, the artist breaks his adolescent vow and does return home, having become a successful figure in the cultural establishment, a rich man. He buys property and then is forced to face the demons of his childhood past. His brothers have become pillars of the community: businessmen and entrepreneurs. The questions about what homeland means remain unanswered. Global events determine political, social, economic and cultural changes. Bear in mind the words of Margaret Thatcher, one of neo-liberalism's most strident advocates who famously said: 'There is no such thing as society.' She meant that the world is made up of individuals each following their personal agendas and making money regardless of others. However, individuals make a community. This fact means there has to be a sense of justice, fairness, and mutual responsibility. The six films that make up this final part of the epic tell stories that illustrate how far people departed from any sense of community in the 20th century.

This issue of 'homeland' is illustrated throughout the epic series, and most strikingly towards the end of the first part. The musician son returns to his village with an avant-garde composition, a choral work in the style of Stockhausen. It is the rebel who celebrates traditions of community, specifically those that transcend values he finds

oppressive. The piece is met with blank incomprehension by most of the villagers, and yet it is based on dialect, local speech patterns and the sounds of nature. Only one person is moved and inspired by the music. It is the village eccentric, a poor man, who alone appreciates the composition and grasps the mystery of the imagination to conjure memories and the feeling of place. The music recalls for him long nights with two mates panning for non-existent gold in a local stream. He remembers the beauty of the place: the song of the nightingales, the bubbling waters, the rustling woods, and above all the lads' friendship which had more value than any precious metal they might have found. It is one of the many transcendent moments in this epic series, and perfectly describes the meaning of homeland.

Mirza Basic, who interpreted for us at the Coventry Consultation in 2001, treasures similar memories of his childhood in Bosnia, fishing along the banks of the River Vrbas and swimming in the warm pools. Some Bosnian refugees returned home after the war ended. These included Mirsad Duratevic who escaped the killing camp of Omarska by the skin of his teeth, a story told in my book *the white house: From Fear to a Handshake*. Nostalgia for his homeland compelled Mirsad to return to property that had been completely destroyed: house and orchards burnt to the ground. Mirsad has no revenge in his heart, just a desire to create a homeland for himself and his community there. This community also includes the people who had tried to kill him.

Many refugees decide to settle in their adopted countries. Can they ever come to feel a sense of belonging? The three friends in the first part of *Heimat*, panning for gold in the long summer nights, might now include people from other parts of the world.

Duisburg in the industrial heartland of Germany is now 'Heimat' to Sulfisiya, Saban and their sons, just as Bradford and Leicester in England are homeland to the thousands of Muslims, formerly from Pakistan; as well as Sikhs from India and now people from many other countries. The Pennines running through the counties of

Yorkshire and Lancashire are as much home to their children as they were to me as a child; and I was also a second generation refugee. I felt a sense of home when I roamed the bleak hill tops of the Yorkshire Dales and descended into valleys where streams rush under stone bridges. This sense of home is shared by members of the British National Front, the British equivalent of the Bosnian Serb Nationalists. From 1992 to 1995 these Serbs looked down from the hills around Sarajevo at the mosques, and aimed to blow them all up to create a homeland cleansed of its past and returned to an ethnically pure Serbian race. This race only ever existed in myth and fantasy.

However much racists and xenophobes might wish to cleanse their region of foreigners, each country is homeland to all who live in it. Extremists give voice to feelings shared by many, even liberal people who are tolerant and welcoming but are circumspect in expressing opinions. When a young woman died in a car crash outside Charlbury where I ran a coffeehouse for several years, the local people gathered for their regular cups of coffee and expressed a degree of sympathy. Then one elderly woman, referring to the girl's Indian parentage, said in a loud voice: 'But she wasn't one of us.' The silence of the others indicated their agreement. Yet this girl had lived all her life in the town. It was her 'heimat'. If she were not 'one of us' where then did she belong?

From my homeland, beyond the red lightning flash, dark clouds are coming. But father and mother have long been dead. No one knows me there anymore. O how soon, how soon, will I also be at rest, and above me murmurs the beautiful stillness of woods, and no one will know me here any more. Eichendorff

INTERLOPERS AND LUNATICS

Saban and Yildirim played the guzli at home in Duisburg, singing Turkish songs, nostalgia for a remembered 'heimat'. Their children would grow up with this music

and culture in their heads and hearts, but be also imbibing European influences. Each would inspire and influence the other, changing in the same subtle ways as happened in Bosnia over the centuries where folk music blends melodies, rhythms and harmonies from different traditions: Serb, Croat as well as Turkish. Despite nationalist zeal which turns football matches between Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia into mini-wars, when it comes to the Eurovision Song Contest all three hostile countries vote for each other. The fabric of music in all three countries is so closely interwoven that the traditions cannot be separated. West Indian reggae became part of the mainstream of music in England, and as western pop alters the style of Indian bangra, so different cultures interact and express a new 'heimat'.

Interlopers have always been part of European society. Their differences represent a threat to indigenous traditions. Gypsies and hippy 'travellers' attract scorn, fear and hatred. They are considered criminals. Their apparently unfettered way of life suggests sexual freedom which threatens the nuclear family unit: the mainstay of western traditional social values. This alleged sexual liberty was always an exotic fantasy titillating the imagination of a repressive society. In fact these interlopers live to rigid moral codes. They also suffer restrictions as well as persecution.

Refugees and communities of foreigners settling in Europe are not only gypsies or travellers, who prize their independence, but people wishing to be assimilated while preserving their traditions. However they rouse the same fears in those who believe they are being pushed out of their 'heimat': hence the false claims of immigrants being given homes, cars and money which should be 'ours', and molesting our children, engaging in crime, drug-dealing, petty theft and street muggings. Facts show that such crimes are evenly distributed between all communities, flourishing more in poor areas where immigrants are often forced to live. Major crimes such as corruption, large-scale fraud and crooked business dealings are more likely to be

carried out at the highest levels of society, hand in glove with those who are in power. Even if it were true that immigrants were taking what belongs to the indigenous community, they could never be in a position to drive out the natives who would only ever leave of their own accord. But immigrants remain a convenient scapegoat for the failings and inadequacies of those unable to achieve their ambitions in a highly competitive society, where only the most cunning take most of the wealth.

Another feared outsider is the lunatic. The Polish sculptor Gaudier Brzka, who came to live and work in England, carved a self-portrait and called it *Face of an Idiot*. It expresses the razor edge of madness and creativity experienced particularly by original artists. The face shows the yearning and innocent features of a mentally-impaired man staring wistfully and uncomprehendingly up at the world, neck straining, as though searching for an answer to his condition which nevertheless he is too foolish to realize is lunacy.

That kind of madness threatens ordered society because it questions the motives and objectives of what is traditionally considered normal civilized life. So lunatics have to be locked away and kept out of sight. At one time they used to be a familiar sight, part of every community, mocked by children, pitied by adults, reduced to begging but accepting of their situation however destitute. In Russia they were known as 'holy fools' and respected as well as mocked. They were permitted freedom of speech without fear of punishment. Such a character dominates the conclusion of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, based on Pushkin historical drama which deals with the power struggles in medieval Russia at a time of political chaos. The mighty Tsar Boris listens attentively to the prophecies and accusations of the 'holy fool'. The tsar is dying going insane with guilt. He committed murder to gain power for what he considered to be the honourable aim of bringing order to his country. His death plunges the country again into chaos of political intrigue and the arrival of a

Pretender. In some versions of the opera the simpleton has the last word, calling on the people to grieve and endure.

Gaudier Brzka's self-portrait, *Face of an Idiot*, expresses a wisdom we ignore to our loss: that the outsider, the person we reject because of difference and fear, does in fact reflect our common humanity.

Once we are able to see the stranger as no threat or lesser being but rather the one who expands our horizons, who can be our new inspiration, our teacher, our friend and even lover, then we begin to solve the issue of how we own and share the world which in all its variety and mystery is, after all, our mutual 'heimat'.

THE GYPSIES IN BRUSSELS

Just as the Islamic community in Europe and beyond began to welcome and trust us the politicians and Churches withdrew support.

We found many MEPs in Brussels to be arrogant, self-obsessed and concerned mainly about their salaries, expenses and positions. Politically they followed party lines and held rigidly to their prejudices. One MEP insisted that Islam had no place in Europe and should be kept out. Every four to five years they adopt a fawning mode towards the electorate, simpering for votes, then, once installed in their positions of power, revert to arrogant form. They create obstacles to progress and keep suppliants at bay. This is how democracy functions in present-day Europe.

The exhaustion of politicians is reflected in their inaccessibility. The constant ringing of mobiles indicate that all of them can be contacted, but choose not to be reached. Politicians and religious leaders shut the door on us and kept it locked, their phones permanently blocked. In an age of unparalleled opportunity for mutual access people in power simply choose to turn us off.

Père Gaudeul, the White Father in Paris, looked at us with amused surprise at our persistence. He had given us a long list of names to contact, and made it clear he had done his duty. He had been invited on a global tour to give lectures on *Conversion from Islam*, beginning in Hyderabad. The subject of his talk struck us as futile and untimely, given that mutual understanding and not conversion was the burning issue. He did however give us useful warning about being too involved with politicians at a time of corruption scandals. Partisan allegiances were already a problem with MEPs like Doris Pack. She disapproved of our support for Muslims, as she saw it at the expense of Catholics in Bosnia. Her favoured relationship had a long history. Germany found common ground with Catholic Croats during the Second World War. The fascist Ustashi associated themselves closely with the Nazis. ‘Croats are our friends,’ remained the mantra in Germany, where people by now should have been better informed about the criminal nature of the original alliances. These links between Germans and Catholics went back to the 19th century when priests and monks descended on what they considered to be a savage backward region of Europe, bringing with them industry and education as well as religious practice. Muslims were alien to Doris Pack. She harboured a particularly fierce hatred of the Orthodox Church which she blamed for the violence in the Bosnia War despite evidence that Catholics too had committed ethnic cleansing and massacres. As to the role of Croat fascists in the Second World War, Doris Pack either did not remember this fact or kept silent about it.

On our journeys we experienced several bizarre encounters with people who wanted to meet us, but seemed to have no interest or purpose in our work. These included an impressively tall and mysterious Orthodox Bishop based in Paris. No one knew anything about him, not even Père Gaudeul. This Orthodox bishop spent his time attending conferences to which he got himself invited. His sharp features and dark

intense gaze were framed by a wispy white beard and an Orthodox bishop's hat. This picturesque figure provided a symbolic presence wherever he went, including our Brussels Consultation, and that seemed to count for something.

Frustrated and defeated by our failure to rouse enthusiasm for our work among the politicians at the European Parliament, we were beginning to discuss strategy with Jenny Lee and Charlie, who had helped organize the Brussels Consultation, at a restaurant on the Place du Grand Sablon in Brussels when a band of Romanian gypsy fiddlers struck up noisily with the familiar rhythms of the Verbunk, a military recruiting dance. The Verbunk used to be a way of enticing young men away from their villages and farm duties to go on military adventures. The men were press-ganged to the strains of rousing music. The macho dance with its baleful offbeat stamping rhythm became a vehicle for elaborate musical variations performed by gypsies. Never called to arms, instead they played the Verbunk at cafés, bars and restaurants for weddings, birthdays and other celebrations.

The improvisatory, virtuosic and poetic nature of this gypsy music inspired the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Franz Liszt. Czardas rhythms colour all his music, from the lively to the sepulchral. His setting of a Lenau poem depicts three gypsies lounging by the side of the road, a provocation to hard-working and law-abiding citizens. One of them fiddles aimlessly, the other dreamily smokes, and the other sleeps while the wind brushes the strings of his cimbalom hanging on a tree. The poem says: 'Three times they showed me how, when life turns to night, man can smoke, sleep, and fiddle it away and three times treat it with contempt.' The gypsies seduce us: it is an idyll suffused with sexual envy and haunted by the allure of 'their dark tanned faces and curly black hair'.

Gypsies are among the most despised of people in Europe today. The Holocaust tried to ethnically cleanse Europe of them, along with Jews, political dissidents and

homosexuals. Most people in capital cities across Europe come across Romanian gypsies begging, but understand little about the society and traditions that are unique to this group of people.

The gypsies playing in the restaurant on the Place du Grand Sablon included a young male violinist following the leader, who had the same dark skin and black curls described in the Liszt song. An older guitarist strummed in front of a coolly nonchalant double bass player, cigar hanging from the side of his mouth as he plucked with minimum effort. A cimbalom player sat in front of a magnificent instrument that was covered with an elaborately embroidered cloth when not being played. He matched the virtuosic pyrotechnics of the lead violinist during the variations. Both kept steady eye contact while the bow and fingers scampered like lightning and the muffled hammers danced at eye-boggling speed over the strings of their respective instruments.

A twenty-euro note tucked under the violin fingerboard indicated that the musicians expected to be tipped but otherwise they paid no attention to us, ignoring our admiring gaze and barely acknowledging applause except for allowing it to inspire each other to ever more dizzying heights of virtuosity.

The proud and dignified performers kept a distance from the listening diners. ‘We are gypsies,’ they seemed to be telling us, ‘and you will never change us.’

The gypsies Liszt and Lenau describe by the roadside are taking a well-earned break from having performed all night for several nights at a local wedding.

DESERT DUST

TA'ARUF IN WINDSOR

The international consultation we arranged with the World Islamic Call Society at St George's House in Windsor took place in March 2004 at a time of mounting tension in the world. Twelve days before the consultation started, terrorist bombs killed two hundred people in Madrid. The day before the consultation started, Israeli forces assassinated the crippled Palestinian Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, as he left a mosque: the peace process in the Middle East once again under threat. A week earlier, disturbances in Kosovo between Muslims and Orthodox Christians triggered a new spate of burning of mosques and churches in Bosnia and Serbia. The war in Iraq was supposed to have ended a year ago but fighting continued with mounting insurgences all over the country, the taking of hostages, hundreds of people dying, and further destabilization in the region.

We intended the Windsor Consultation to follow on from the Ta'aruf Conference at the World Islamic Call Society Da'wa in Tripoli the previous September. Dr Sherif and Donald invited leading thinkers from the Islamic and Christian world to plan a strategy for spreading the principles of Ta'aruf across the globe. The World Islamic Call Society planned for the Windsor Consultation to be followed by similar consultations in Canada, Russia, South East Asia and Africa.

The specific purpose of the Windsor Consultation was to identify precisely the next steps in this initiative of active collaboration between Islam and Christianity. The World Islamic Call Society, the Soul of Europe and all the participants of the consultation agreed on the urgent need to move beyond dialogue between academics and religious leaders. The principles of Ta'aruf should be taken to grass root

communities who are having to learn to live together harmoniously in often stressful conditions because of mutual suspicion and lack of sufficient support, both material and spiritual, in a world become dangerous by wars and terrorism.

The main outcome of the Windsor Consultation was recognition of the prime importance of friendship being established between members of different faiths to provide a firm foundation for future forums and make them resilient for future tasks, which need to be both practical and productive in their aims and outcomes.

The consultation took place in the quiet and comfortable environment of St George's House in the grounds of Windsor Castle Windsor, which encouraged informality as well as intensive work on the main issues. A series of presentations each led to extensive discussion. Guest speakers came at different times to add a fresh perspective and stimulate further thinking.

The programme included showing Tayie Rehem's film about the work of the World Islamic Call Society, with specific reference to the Ta'aruf Conference in Tripoli in September 2003 at which Donald among others spoke of the urgent need for the great world communities not just to talk but to act together.

All participants were invited to attend worship at St George's Chapel. At Evensong a highlight was a performance of Palestrina's *Missa Brevis*, composed as a response to the crisis in the Christian Church at the time of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation. All the arts were ordered by the Catholic Church to express a return to the basic principles of faith. The pain and fervour of this Mass, by the leading Catholic composer of the day, expresses the crisis, political as well as theological, at this moment in European history. During time of violent upheaval religion and politics were indivisible, and power struggles between nations and empires were then exacerbated by imperial ambitions, global expansion, the amassing

of wealth by the few at the expense of the oppressed, and radical expansion of scientific knowledge that challenged, and still challenges, the foundation of belief. The *Missa Brevis* is an example of the power of music to transcend as well as celebrate the doctrines of a particular faith. This music manages simultaneously to express human desire for peace in our world, love with our neighbours, and union with the universe, regardless of faith. The music confronts the agony caused by a conflicted world, as well as by the uncertainties of our own hearts, but the sublime harmonies express a core of hope that somehow we will achieve this peace despite political and religious conflict.

Donald later spoke of the fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam. He quoted a taxi-driver who put it to him bluntly: 'Islam is the final revelation: you are no longer relevant.' Donald wanted to describe the beauty and grace of working with differences.

Dr Sherif laid plans for five regional meetings following from the Ta'aruf Conference at Tripoli in September 2003. Representatives from each group would attend the regional conferences, beginning at Windsor, then going to Canada, Russia, Africa and South East Asia. They would all meet again in Tripoli towards the end of the year and decide on future objectives which needed to be concrete and practical.

Although the outcome of the meeting promised development of mutual projects, this consultation marked the end of our association with the World Islamic Call Society. Not because of any falling out or disagreement; in fact relations remained as friendly, and as opaque as before. Dr Sherif's son and Omar Farhad attended Donald's 70th birthday reception at Lambeth Palace, and presented the Soul of Europe with an elaborately sculpted brass model of a dhow engraved with a fulsome inscription. 'Melt it down!' someone suggested to us, knowing about our financial difficulties.

Shortly after, the World Islamic Call Society ceased funding us. We had fulfilled our usefulness.

Matters came to a head at a midnight meeting in St George's House Windsor after a hectic day of meetings, speeches, discussions, and arrangements. Donald sat exhausted and stared sadly into the middle distance while Ageli el Meri, one of the new faces in the organization who now occupied a position of authority, sucked his cheeks, leafed idly through some of our documents and asked: 'What is the Soul of Europe? What do you do? Why should we support you?' What had we been doing all the time together these last couple of years? What about the Coventry and Brussels Consultations, let alone the one we were attending that very moment? He assured us that 'we were friends, and therefore can speak honestly to each other', then added insult to injury by commenting that organizing such a consultation was easy. It only required a couple of phone-calls, and therefore he did not consider it necessary to pay us for our work.

After our meeting with Ageli el Meri we knew we were being shown the door.

On the final afternoon, when the guests and speakers had left, we sat disconsolately together with Bishop John Austin, Andrew Barr, Ageli el Meri and Omar Farhad to clear up final financial matters. Omar opened a suitcase and, all the time smiling broadly, began counting from a thick stack of freshly printed banknotes to cover the expenses of the consultation. He was always in his element counting money. Ageli el Meri reminded us again that organizing conferences constituted no effort. Sniffing, he offered us two hundred Euros for all our work. He then demanded a detailed report of the consultation sent in a form ready for publication. We also blamed ourselves for not negotiating a fee with the World Islamic Call Society before taking on the organizing of the Windsor Consultation. Donald remembered the weeks of phoning, cajoling, finding then losing speakers, writing long letters persuading people to come,

fixing and planning the agenda of the consultation. I fumed silently watching him being humiliated by Ageli el Meri who had not even bothered to inform himself about the Soul of Europe. Omar tried to soothe us with his friendly smiles. He knew that we had been cut out of the World Islamic Call Society program and wanted to reassure us that we were still friends, even though we would not be working together again. ‘You are always in our hearts!’ he exclaimed.

It would take several months before we understood the full significance of what had happened at Windsor. Reassurances that Donald would be invited to future conferences were not kept. The final humiliation happened later in the summer when an invitation to attend a conference in Trinidad came via Canada. Assuming this to be a Ta’aruf event where we could meet Dr Sherif again and discuss future programs, Donald arrived only to discover that not a single person from the organization was there, let alone Dr Sherif. A journalist from Trinidad who attended the 2003 Ta’aruf gathering in Tripoli had remembered Donald’s rousing speeches and invited him on his own initiative to a conference attended by local people.

Despite our disappointment we had to remind ourselves that the World Islamic Call Society had helped us generously in the past and kept the Soul of Europe alive when no one else was prepared to fund us.

The Windsor Consultation consisted of the familiar speeches encouraging Christians and Muslims to understand each other; clearing up misconceptions about Islam in particular, and finding points of mutual agreement among the Abrahamic faiths. Fatima Gailani, an exiled political leader from Afghanistan, presented a bleak picture of political life in her home country. There the American forces sustained a corrupt administration of war chieftains who kept the money and continued to fight each other. Meanwhile these local leaders encouraged the growth in opium trade. The rest of the people in Afghanistan felt unsafe and had become so disillusioned that they

actually wished for a return to the Taliban years. Her words hinted at what the future in Iraq might be like under western influence. Fatima Gailani's father had been a respected spiritual leader in Afghanistan, presumably before the Taliban took power. The war chieftains kept begging her to return and become the acceptable face of new Afghan democracy, but she refused, knowing that she would be used as a front for their continuing criminal activities.

The Muslim speakers at the Windsor Consultation kept repeating the same eloquent and pacific speeches they delivered at conferences wherever they were invited. The Christians spent most of the time listening, asking questions for clarification of Koranic teaching. The former President of Lebanon, Amine Gemayel, spoke about the need for an ongoing discussion on inter-faith issues at the level of the United Nations. This sounded like a bid to become its future General Secretary.

Several Christian representatives from France, Germany and England seemed cowed by all the flowery eloquence from the Muslim speakers and contributed little, though declared how pleased they were to have been invited and that they were all learning something. This missed the point of the consultation at which they should have engaged more with the issues. When they presented me with their travel expenses, I felt that there had been no need for them to come: their attendance had been a waste of our limited funds.

Donald made up for the wetness of the Christian contributions by giving a vivid account of our time in Bosnia. The best came last. A former nun, Dr Karen Armstrong, a formidable intellect and speaker and a writer and specialist on Islam-Christian relations, arrived on the final day to rouse everybody with a potent summing up of the issues around Christian and Islamic misunderstandings. The other speakers presented their papers like academics, but she spoke directly out of her honed

knowledge of Muslim culture, the Koran, and the history behind the relationships between Christianity and Islam.

Dr Mahmoud Ayoub, the most eloquent of the Muslim speakers, gave an exegesis on the Koran's positive attitude to mutual understanding between the faiths. He looked like a clever schoolboy with his close-cropped hair and eager, attentive attitude, putting his hand up after others had spoken to comment on what they had just said, either to support or admonish them. Despite his blindness he recognized everybody. When I sat next to him at supper he indicated straight away that he knew all about me and my work with the Soul of Europe to the extent I was worried he knew even more about me than I would have liked him to. We shared our love of music, especially the *Credo* from Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, Dr Ayub declaring that it spoke more about Christianity than any sermon or ritual; and enthused about the performance of the Palestrina *Missa Brevis* we had just heard in St Georges Chapel. He then bent over to me conspiratorially and told me that the best gifts God gave to mankind was music. He added with a mischievous chuckle: 'and women!'

A moment of truth came in a conversation with Dr Samura from Sierra Leone. All day he looked dignified, dressed smartly in a dark suit with a watch on a gold chain. He smiled encouragingly at everyone and was always ready to give a friendly hug. He carried the formidable title of Ambassador accredited to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Chad and Malta, as well as being Under Secretary for Africa to the World Islamic Call Society. Before supper on the second day he told me, almost in passing, about his experiences in Sierra Leone where he witnessed the massacre of a large portion of his family, hacked to death in the recent civil war. He was about to be killed himself when he closed his eyes and prayed fervently to God to preserve him. For some reason at that very moment the soldiers stopped slaughtering and left his home, so he and his wife survived. Eventually the World Islamic Call Society came to his rescue

and brought him to Libya. Dr Samura spoke quietly about all this as though it were a normal occurrence, the way the world is and what everyone has to go through; that he was not a special case. He reminded me with a shock that the world had indeed become a place where life is expendable and the inflicting of immeasurable suffering on people has become commonplace, part of everyday policy.

IN THE STEPS OF ABRAHAM

On May 13th 2004 we attended a conference in Istanbul. The highlight was a visit to Mardin in the South East of Turkey close to the borders with Iraq and Syria.

Mardin is an ancient city in a region once known as Northern Mesopotamia. It is thought to be the birth place of Abraham, founding father of the three religious faiths which first influenced and then dominated the history of Western Asia, Europe and eventually the rest of the world for good and bad throughout the next three thousand years.

Cemal Usak, the kindly man from the Writers Federation in Istanbul who gave us such a warm welcome on our previous visits to Turkey, had invited us both to give lectures at the conference: an International Symposium on *Religion and Peace in the Light of Forefather Abraham*.

The landscape around Mardin had barely changed since the time of Abraham. Towns and villages were hewn from the rocks and dust, as they might have been all those thousands years ago.

A heavily armed convoy accompanied us throughout the journey: ambulances, numerous police cars and tanks drove in front of and behind the bus which was packed with patriarchs, muftis, bishops, rabbis, politicians, and scholars, as well as

other eminent guests and the media. The convoy snaked through the deserted mountains, across wide stony plains and along dusty valleys. The birthplace of Western civilization had become one of the most dangerous and unstable regions in the world. Tanks stood at major junctions and turnings. On the rooftops of every town and village along the way soldiers stood sentry with cocked rifles. Meanwhile, farmers worked the fields of maize with the same tools as their forefathers: bare hands, ploughs and oxen. The streets were lined with white-toothed smiling children, one arm draped around each others necks, the other free to wave; women ululated from upper rooms and balconies, while men watched silently and suspiciously from roadside cafes.

This area, though saturated with the Turkish army, remains under the control of Kurds who make up the bulk of the population and continue to demand independence. For thousands of years the originally nomadic Kurds spread across the borders into Northern Iraq, Syria and further into all the neighbouring countries. Kurds once controlled a wide area of the Middle East and Asia, but for a long time have had no independent country of their own. They have long been feared and hated by their host countries because they constitute such a large and powerful group in all those different nation states. Kurds also defy borders and regimes. Saddam Hussein tried to control them in Iraq by ethnic cleansing, chemical poisoning, imprisoning and massacring. Turkey keeps them under strict political control. Kurdish separatists remain a constant threat, and visitors need to be protected from terrorist outrages or kidnapping. My friend Aras Nader is a Kurd living in England. He escaped prison, torture and attempted murder by the Saddam regime. Forced to leave his wife, daughter and two sons, he fled Iraq, crossed borders, walked through Europe, and eventually arrived in England where for ten years he worked in business as an IT consultant. He earned sufficient to send money home to his family, and bought land

to enlarge his property there. The recession destroyed his business. Life once again became a struggle. Overcome with longing for family, he returned to his home town near Irbil. On Skype, he described the difficult situation in Iraq: the lack of employment and the corruption in government. Arguments with his family over land and property preoccupied him. After a year's silence he returned to England. Since then the family he left behind has been driven from home by the terrifying Islamic State, which also killed a cousin and his two sons. 'You can have no idea what I am going through,' he tells me.

Kurdish independence, rights to self-government and preserving cultural identity as a minority, have dominated the Middle East for generations. While the various countries in which Kurds live hold fast to principles of nationhood, there seems to be no solution to the question of Kurdish independence.

Similar issues on both ethnic and religious grounds have caused unresolved conflict across the world. In Europe it was the perceived denial of rights of German minorities in regions bordering the mother country that triggered the Second World War: Silesia in Poland, Sudetenland in the former Czechoslovakia and Alsace in France. Poles in the Ukraine and Romania, Romanians in the former Russian territory of Moldova, and ethnic minorities along the borders of most countries everywhere, have all raised similar issues with varying degrees of violence. The political and religious issues in the Balkans during the centuries as part of the Ottoman Empire, and the even longer history of conflicts between Catholics and Orthodox later exacerbated by a hatred of Islam, caused the latest war in Europe. Immigration is a movement of communities across the world: a heritage of colonialism, and its aftermath of unresolved issues of guilt, exploitation, and mutual mistrust. Immigration continually alters the demography of Europe.

The insistence of countries to preserve the ethnic purity of their nationhood became a relatively recent concept, inspiring the collapse of empires. Two thousand years ago the Romans controlled most of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. There followed the Holy Roman Empire which covered most of Central Europe as an exclusively Christian entity. This continued into the twentieth century. The Orthodox Christian Byzantine Empire in Middle East was usurped by the Muslim Ottomans. The desire of demagogues, first Napoleon in the nineteenth century and then Hitler in the twentieth, to create a united Europe, though under either French or German domination, led to perpetual conflict. The bitter memory of this recent history fuels suspicions about a united 'federal' Europe among a vociferous, sizable minority of its peoples. The issue of forging a federation of independent European nation states, each with a long history of different cultures, languages and political traditions remains unresolved. However, the unstoppable movement of people across borders creating the concept of a global village has now made the argument for ethnically pure nation states redundant.

The journey to Mardin became a pilgrimage to the place where an influential civilization started. People settled in the land to the south, between two great rivers, where they flourished in a fertile region. Communities began to trade. This led to the development of accountancy, laws and regulations, language and culture. Religious rituals expressed the stirrings of the imagination in sculpture, architecture, epic poetry, myths and stories. These in turn led to the creation of language to record history, what people did, including crimes they committed and unending conflicts.

For all the present day political instability in what used to be Northern Mesopotamia, the three Abrahamic faiths coexisted over the centuries of conquest, and re-conquest, in relative harmony. Perhaps the people took to heart the stories of Abraham and his hospitality to strangers, as well as his attempts to end the lethal feuding of the many

tribes in the region with their equally numerous gods, by urging them to gather their faiths under a single god. Just as the founders of Christianity and Islam saw their main task as bringing peace, so Abraham trusted in a single god to provide a resolution to the conflicts ravaging the region. Over subsequent centuries, tribal factions created friction even within the same faith. Conflicts were inflamed by foreign interference in the politics and economies of the region to the present day.

THE JOURNEY TO MARDIN

LIGHT

The light around Mardin has the radiance and intensity of a dream. It renders the experience timeless. A striking feature of the landscape is the piles of rocks on the hilltops. These could be natural rock formations. Maybe people built cairns there. The valleys spread into wide plains where the occasional group of women in brightly coloured kerchiefs bend lean bodies to weed and hoe against the ochre, umber and sienna soil. My mentor, the Lancashire artist Theodore Major, taught me that these tints provide the foundation of painting. Here in Northern Mesopotamia they constitute the landscape, in light and shade, with the occasional intense shock of deep green from fig and olive orchards, the splash of scarlet poppies, and the sparkle of blue wild borage. The light so intensifies the colours that there is no differentiation between the distant and the near: the detailed shading on the most distant hills is as clear as the shapes of plants passed on the roadside.

Such light might be the sign of unpolluted nature, or the clarity of a day in early summer. Even in the dusty towns we visited, the same intense radiance shone from the house walls, the smiling wrinkled faces of women looking down from the balconies or around the entrances of walled gardens, and from the glistening wide

dark eyes of children. Whatever changes history brought to the world, these people, homes and nature remain constant, as they used to be where the story of our civilization began.

A strong wind, a regular weather feature in these parts, delayed our plane landing. Eventually, after circling the bare hills and plains below, we descended onto a narrow military airstrip. A formidable sight of two long lines of dancers in elaborate folk costume greeted us: the women behind the men. The town dignitaries waited to shake our hands and present each of us with a carnation as we descended from the aircraft. Ferocious warlike music blared from loud wind instruments accompanied by a resounding drum. This noise once brought the walls of Jericho tumbling down. The dancers, linked tightly by arms clasped around each other's waists, executed a rhythmically complex kicking step and bounced energetically in unison. The women, matched the strong and muscular men in vigour. We were evidently honoured guests, but we also quickly realized that few people visited this part of the world. Because of the dangers along the borders with Iraq and Syria nearby, as well as threats from Kurdish separatists, visitors are discouraged, and the whole area has been turned into a military zone.

We drove across a plain towards a range of mountains, up a valley along a winding road to the five thousand year old city of Mardin. It is carved out of the hillside. Houses, churches and mosques rise in tiers to the summit, where domes and minarets stand against a clear blue sky.

The bus took us away from the city. The road became steeper and narrower, so we edged slowly passed crowds of people, police and soldiers until we arrived at an old medressa, a school for Islamic studies, situated high on a hillside overlooking a wide plain to the south. We were ushered through the entrance in the thick high wall, built

like a fortification. The landscape below with dark-green olive and fig orchards dotting a pale ochre semi-arid plain stretches towards a mountain range: the border with Iraq and Syria.

It seemed incongruous, enjoying this peaceful view, that US planes were circling the skies not a hundred miles away, and that a neighbouring country should be in the middle of a war.

The entrance to the medressa led through a dark cool corridor into a spacious courtyard, where a dense crowd of dignitaries, muftis, rabbis, priests and bishops, including Patriarch Bartolomeo from Istanbul, had gathered. All were dressed in full regalia, a bewildering variety of headgear. Orthodox bishops were the most prominent, with large bushy beards down to their waists.

These distinguished guests were already seated being photographed by an animated crowd of photographers and journalists who trampled over the green plastic turf in the courtyard. In the centre was a square, ornamental fish pond. A stream from a spring in the mountainside behind the medressa ran through the pond. It flowed out the other side, then down into the plain. The pond was full of carp. The fish flicked their tails, and huddled together, keeping a watchful eye on the shadows flitting above.

Swallows swooped occasionally from the roofs.

Large white drapes, banners and flags fluttered across the high walls and balconies which overlooked the courtyard. Women and children, the girls dressed as bridesmaids and the boys in eye-blindingly white uniforms, packed these balconies and stared open-mouthed at the crowds milling below.

Choirs representing Jewish, Armenian Orthodox, Catholic and Sufi Muslims were seated together in groups on a platform in a shaded recess, facing the religious leaders and politicians.

Hours later the ceremony began with the haunting lowing of a ram's horn, familiar to Jewish communities over the millennia. Then church bells pealed for the Christians. Finally a muezzin intoned the Islamic call to prayer in a clarion baritone voice.

A celebrated male pop star, slim, tall, tousle-haired and fashionably suited opened the proceedings with a song which the women and children in the upper balconies cheered wildly.

Speech followed speech: Presidents, local governors, mayors, senators from Ankara, then one religious leader after the other, each being presented in turn by a young master of ceremonies dressed in white flannels and a blue blazer with gold buttons. He translated into English with an American accent, trying to enliven the proceedings by cracking jokes and leaping athletically over a bridge which had been constructed temporarily over the carp pond.

The speakers stood in the middle of the bridge and addressed the crowds which were confined in the courtyard, no one able to move, so tightly packed was the space. Most of the speeches were in Turkish or Arabic, and seemed to continue ad infinitum. The sun beat so unremittingly down on our heads that we had to be constantly refreshed with bottles of chilled water. I longed for a trapdoor to open in the middle of that bridge so that I could fall through it.

Occasionally the talking ceased, allowing one of the choirs to perform a traditional religious song. The Armenians hurled their powerful voices with commitment as though calling each other from one mountain top to another. The Sufis chanted as in a trance. Soloists were positioned in every corner of the building around the courtyard.

After several hours the ceremony concluded with a line-up of all the religious leaders: the Patriarch, Chief Mufti, the Chief Rabbi in purple holding the Torah on gold chains, bishops both Catholic and a variety of Orthodox, including Syrians with their bulbous black hats culminating in a little spike, and the Armenians with their

pointy black hoods held rigid by cones underneath the cloth. Donald joined them as representative of the Anglican Church.

Patriarch Bartolomeo then lead the religious leaders in a procession over the bridge: a symbolic gesture of peace and reconciliation between all religions, indicating that all people should take this message in the direction of the flow of water from the spring, through the carp pond and out into the world beyond. We were told that crossing over the bridge was the journey through death to salvation and the plastic green garden on the other side, now trampled by the media, represented paradise.

The religious leaders gathered on paradise and released a flock of doves. Everyone followed them, slowly filing through the dark corridor towards the entrance with its wide panoramic view of Mesopotamia. The stream from the medressa cascaded down the mountain side to the plain below, eventually to join the River Tigris flowing through Iraq.

Before the bus began the long drive from monastery to mosque, to ancient towns and other historic sites around South Eastern Turkey it first took us to the Deyru I Zaferan monastery for the first of a number of feasts we would consume on the rest of our journey. Hundreds of people joined us for lunch in the central courtyard, though it remained a mystery how they had managed to reach this remote place, secluded in the middle of a range of mountains and miles away from any town. Each person received a plastic tray with kebabs and salads. We did not have time to explore the chapels and crypts of this ancient building because we were already late for the next destination.

MIDYAT

A single heavily armed soldier, rifle cocked, stood on a prominent rooftop in the central square of the town keeping a watchful eye on the milling crowds of men below. The men, alerted by the extra military presence and the convoy of police cars

and ambulances, stared suspiciously at the procession of bishops, muftis and other dignitaries disembarking from the coach. Only children and ululating women seemed pleased to see us, excited by this unique event.

We marched up traffic-empty streets, blinded by the light from the pale walls and pavements, to be shown a grand house at the top of the town built in the Syrian style. Now a hotel, it had once been a residence belonging to a wealthy Syrian family. One of the dignitaries' wives became almost hysterical with emotion as she remembered her childhood there. The house used to swarm with family members and guests, from all over the region: the doors always open. Now the rooms had been modernised and elegantly furnished, with clean white linen sheets on the beds, and en-suite bathrooms. Watercolours decorated the walls of the airy corridors.

Standing on the flat rooftop, the purpose of our visit to this remote town became clear. Even closer to the Iraqi and Syrian borders than Mardin, the churches, synagogues and mosques of Midyat stood cheek by jowl. A mixed community lived here. People slept on the flat roofs to keep cool during the hot nights. Not all the housetops had balustrades, and people did sometimes fall off them in the dark.

The breeze blew refreshingly through the rooms of the hotel. We saw no guests and assumed they had moved out for the day while hundreds of dignitaries overran the place. On the other hand: who would dare visit this remote town situated in the middle of one of the most dangerous places in the world?

We strolled back down the narrow streets to the bus, passing small craft shops selling mostly gold jewellery. The men in the square continued to eye us intently. Above them on the roof the soldier kept his solitary watch.

BEYOND MIDYAT

The coach and convoy sped along the semi-arid plain between Midyat and the Deyru-l Umur Syriac monastery. Among the stones sparkled large bushy plants, a species of wild borage: their tiny star-like blossoms matched the cerulean sky, intensifying the blue. We passed the now familiar Turkish army tanks stationed at strategic points and bends in the road, and isolated farms where the deep emerald of vegetable fields glowed vivid against the pale ochre of the rest of the landscape. Women laboured in the fields, men drove donkey carts and children stood stock still in amazement at the rare sight we presented.

Occasionally mountains rose from the plain: rocks and stones tumbling from the precipitous summits. Abraham was once thrown down one of these mountains by a tribal chief he had infuriated. Abraham was trying to convert the chief to monotheism. Instead of dashing his head against the rocks, he landed in a carp pond that God had miraculously made appear in the nick of time. There could be no greater contrast to the heavy boulders in this wilderness than the soft bed of a pool crammed with fish. This explains the significance of the carp-pond in the medressa earlier.

In the rolling hills of Mesopotamia we came to the 4th century Deyru-l Umur monastery. An orchard of fig, almond and peach trees surrounded the front gate. The monumental splendour of this monastery indicated its importance. We were lead around several chapels with high domes where services were in progress. The walls were sparingly decorated and enough light streamed through the windows so only a few flickering candles in low hanging chandeliers were needed to illuminate the space. The airiness and cool radiance of the pale walls contrasted with the darker, more cavernous and sumptuously coloured spaces in most other Orthodox churches.

The main event was a banquet laid out for us on long tables in the large courtyard. We were already delayed by several hours and had to rush this feast as well as miss

visiting several more mosques and monasteries. However, crowds of people had turned up as they had at the Deyru-l Zaferan monastery earlier despite the place being hard to reach in the middle of a wilderness. The crowds just materialized, as though drawn by the fragrance of the roasted lamb. They gathered in a hefty crush around the tables and polished off the dishes, so within minutes nothing remained.

Just as we were rushed away I managed to snatch a few plain looking biscuits on a plate which had been ignored in favour of more substantial fare. I bit into them during the next stage of the journey. After an initial crunch of crisp roasted hazelnut they melted on the tongue in a blend of sensuous buttery nutty honey perfumed with rose-water. This one bite suddenly and powerfully evoked the Arabian Nights and everything seductive about the east: the sun-drenched landscape, the intense flavour of its produce, the welcoming friendliness of dark eyes and glistening smiles, the mystery not knowing what will happen next. Could it be pleasure or danger, perhaps both at once? Who would have thought a humble little biscuit to have such an effect? The French writer Marcel Proust, for one, who spun a novel of over a thousand pages from the taste of a Madeleine biscuit dunked in lime-leaf tea. That flavour conjured up a childhood memory. This hazelnut biscuit triggered thoughts about home-coming, friendship, love, history and tradition: the fundamentals of human social life.

As night fell we began the return to Mardin. The convoy snaked its way like a diamond necklace moving through a series of ravines.

Late in the evening, the coach stopped at a town on the border with Syria. We gazed through wire mesh into blackness. Like our first crossing into Serbia from Hungary in the winter of 2000 we sensed the approach of a place with different rules, and possible danger. Then we processed into the town centre where it seemed the whole population greeted us with banners and even greater enthusiasm than at Midyat. We were taken around an ancient site that had once been a Roman basilica, then converted into a

church, and finally into a mosque. We stumbled over ruins. Carved stones littered the ground. We peered at old statues of what could have been gods, goddesses or saints. Music blared from loudspeakers as the town prepared for a party but we were already late for our return to Istanbul and rushed back to the coach. A boy with ecstatically shining eyes dashed up to us and spoke excitedly in English, proud to practice, telling us about the ancient site and of his desire to visit England. Before we could get to know him and ask more questions he ran off as quickly as he had appeared, suddenly overcome with shyness. Then the sky erupted with a massive fireworks display. Clearly the arrival of the Patriarch, Chief Mufti, and Chief Rabbi as well as assorted bishops and dignitaries was as important to this town as a royal visit. Several bands struck up in vigorous competition with the loudspeakers, so what with the deafening explosions in the sky it sounded like a Charles Ives symphony on steroids. Afterwards, our coach driver informed us gleefully how prisoners in the local jail assuming outbreak of war with Syria and had tried to escape. One of them succeeded but was so frightened by the noise that he ran back to his cell.

Eventually we reached Mardin at about midnight where yet another banquet waited for us. As we sat on chairs that had been wrapped in festive paper around elaborately decked tables, we were served roast lamb garnished with vegetables. The mayor gave yet another long speech about the importance of this gathering, thanking us for coming and a young man gave an enthusiastic lecture with a slide-show about the history of this historic region. In between numerous pictures of sculptures and architecture he talked about local industries and agriculture. Then the skies above the city on the hillside in full view of the restaurant, exploded again with a firework display which continued to the end of the meal. Flashes lit up the mosques, churches and houses. The sheer extravagance of the event had the effect of reviving our flagging energies. We could not but be inspired by such a celebration.

Opposite us sat Petrus Bsteh, the Viennese professor who ran the Christian-Muslim association in Austria and who had attended the Windsor Consultation. Wherever he went, whether chilly England or stiflingly hot Turkey, he wore the same heavy anorak and he perpetually wiped his perspiring brow. He patiently moved a long strand of grey hair that kept falling over and then stuck out an angle, making him look both euphoric and at his wits end. His presence was always reassuring as he smiled broadly every time we met, holding his arms out in welcome as he did to everyone. He did not contribute in the way of long speeches but his general friendliness made up for lack of words. Everyone knew him. He spent most of his life going from one conference to another, welcomed not only by Christians but especially Muslims who when he arrived at Istanbul gathered enthusiastically around him, hugged him, then placed an arm protectively around his shoulder throughout the journey to Mardin. He spent his time encouraging people between sessions. In his quiet, unassuming, intensely thoughtful manner he was an important member of any consultation. And even when utterly exhausted, as now, he could still shake his head, eyes brimful of tears and express what we all felt and wanted to say: ‘What generosity! What kindness! They have far surpassed themselves! What a privilege to be here! What good people! It is incredible how good they are!’ Where in the western part of Europe would such a welcome be ever given to people like us, if we were strangers from the east?

We finally staggered out and piled for the last time into the coach to be taken to the airport where our plane stood waiting for us, standing solitary on the runway. It was long past that hour of the night the French call *l’heure bleu*: the moment when night turns into the start of a new day.

We reached the hotel in Istanbul at 5.00am, exactly twenty four hours after we left it.

These twenty four hours could only skim the surface of this region, but they left impressions which had the intensity of dreams: fantastic but true. They had significance on many levels, especially linking the contrast of ancient and modern through the unchanged landscape and culture of the birthplace of our civilization with the reality of brutal present-day conflicts.

FOR HE THAT IS MIGHTY

The two day symposium in Istanbul consisted altogether of forty speeches in total, not including introductions and valedictions, the latter two taking up the time of four lectures. We were punch drunk with words. Two names dominated: Huntington and Hagar.

The former should not have come as a surprise, constantly mentioned and quoted, the name spat out with especial venom: Hontinkonn. I had assumed no one would take serious notice of the American professor's warning of the 'clash of cultures' between Christianity and Islam. This thesis crudely advocates the need for a new crusade by the predominantly Christian West, the assumed champion of 'liberty and progress' against the 'backward terrorist hordes of fundamentalist' Muslims: a battle which should crush and annihilate Islam for ever. His thesis provided the bedrock of American policy in Afghanistan and Iraq, and encouraged free expression of even more extreme views by pundits and media darlings for whom every Muslim was a terrorist and the only good Muslim a dead one. This brought back memories of the Cold War: 'Better dead than red!' The world had returned with a vengeance to the days of anti-communist witch-hunts, Islam being the new enemy. Reason had no place in this bluster of bigotry and outrage. 9:11 provided these new crusaders with sufficient cause. Any attempt at rational argument would be dismissed with the accusation: 'So you put your opinions before the deaths of three thousand people!'

This provocative polemic raised such a barrage of issues that there seemed no point in beginning to dismantle them. One thing became clear: the world was now sharply divided, not between Islam and Christianity, but between two totally opposed views on how to deal with a deliberately fabricated issue which pitted one political system against a different way of life. In England this division of opinion focussed on whether the invasion of Iraq was justifiable or a criminal act, and had already split families and friendships. The ongoing confusion in the Middle East, far from encouraging some form of consensus, only served to harden these opposing convictions. Prime Minister Blair remained evangelically convinced of the rightness of his decision to invade, an intransigent attitude that only fuelled the impotent despair of a large dissenting majority. Meanwhile the hunt for terrorists meant increasingly draconian laws, infringement of civil liberties, alienation of Muslim communities living in the west, and a subsequent increase of mutual suspicion between all ethnic groups. The Soul of Europe's work with the Brussels Network of Muslims and non-Muslims, working together on projects throughout Europe, never seemed more necessary, and now more than ever under threat.

Symposiums such as this in Istanbul became a platform for rational argument: hence the heartfelt pleas by Muslim speakers for all decent people from every background to denounce the inflammatory theories of right-wing Americans such as Professor Huntington. The speakers urged all people to resist the calls for a new crusade. The passion of their rhetoric became a reminder, rather than a belated warning, that the crusade was already in full swing: evidence being the mounting deaths and casualties in Iraq a year after the war was supposed to have ended. Saddam Hussein, the chief cause of the invasion, had long been incarcerated and executed. The Palestinian issue remained ever further from resolution.

The constant references to Huntingdon only emphasised the despair of a threatened and seemingly defeated people. Inevitably then, the most inspiring figure to emerge from the Symposium was Hagar. Several speakers spoke at length about her significance, notably the Jesuit Thomas Michel who gave an exposition of her story, drawing parallels with oppressed women all over the world today. His words moved the audience. Hagar was servant to Abraham and his wife Sarah. Sarah being barren, Abraham had a child, Ishmael, with Hagar. Angry and jealous Sarah threw Hagar out into the wilderness. God cared for both women, and encouraged Hagar fight for survival. From the blessing of her son followed the generations of tribes that eventually became Islam. God also blessed the elderly barren Sarah with a child, Isaac. From him followed generations that became Judaism and Christianity. The symposium's need to focus on the despair of Hagar became a depressing reminder to all that the Muslims were under attack from the west, that they too saw themselves in the wilderness. No one spoke much about terrorism. This indicated ambivalence towards those who were resisting the new crusade. Everyone denounced terrorism of course but between the lines could be read an understanding of the despair and resolve of people who refused to submit to being steamrolled by the Western imperialist, neo-liberal juggernaut.

A number of speakers read from voluminous notes, quoting at length with solemnity theologians such as Tertullian, Ambrose and St Cyprian. The speakers looked severe and spoke with the authority of conviction.

However many of the speakers were alert to the significance of this event at a time of such instability in the world. Rabbi Herman Schaalman shed light on our journey to Mardin by reflecting on the principles of order and permanence at the heart of Abrahamic monotheism. Abraham challenged the pagan rituals of Marduk which had institutionalised tribal disputes into annual conflicts, so creating a cycle of insecurity:

a vicious circle that people were helpless to break. Abraham offered a more harmonious alternative. Judaism became a dynamic religion of hope and faith in a better tomorrow. Abraham started out from a town in Northern Mesopotamia. He made a courageous step forward in the development of our common humanity. This explains why he became especially revered by all the faiths he inspired.

The symposium explored the issues of Abraham, Hagar and the present political world crisis made dangerous by Western neo-liberalism's ready acceptance of Huntington's notion of a clash of cultures.

Donald entered like a firecracker into the proceedings, speaking off the cuff with angry passion about the urgency of the present world situation. He irritated some of the other speakers, all Christian, with his 'wake-up call'. Dr Christian Troll thanked him ironically for 'your sermon'. Scott Alexander from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago declared he was fed up with exhortations to wake up, because he had devoted his whole life to resolving these issues. 'There are always people at these kinds of conferences,' he spat, 'who stand up and tell us to wake up and get off our backsides! But they have no idea of the work we are already doing!' Petrus Bsteh in his kindly manner encouraged Donald: 'Don't change! Don't ever change!'

I noted that it was mostly the Christian, and not the Muslim speakers, who expounded on the tragic story of Hagar, though the Muslims were touched and expressed gratitude for the attention given the Mother of Islam. I also noted that the attacks on Huntington came mostly from the Muslims, who then gathered the most enthusiastically around Donald. 'You have fire in your belly!' they told him beaming with admiration. Cemal Usak thanked him, but expressed disappointment that Donald had missed the opportunity to speak more about the Ferhadija Mosque project, one of the main reasons he had invited the Soul of Europe to the Symposium. Since then, Donald established contact with the Turkish ambassador in Sarajevo who reassured us

that the Turkish government planned to financially support the Ferhadija project and there was no need to make a special visit to Ankara.

As always with conferences, the main discussions, friendships, and contacts happened at meal times. The symposium laid on a series of thoughtfully arranged lunches, dinners and guided tours that took us to the main points of interest in Istanbul. These included the historic cemetery leading down to the ancient Eyup Mosque; the Maiden's Tower on an island in the middle of the Hellespont; a night cruise up the Bosphorus, stopping off at a restaurant with a panoramic view of the city with its many hills, mosques, and churches; and finally the Topkapi Palace.

We made friends with Hartmut Dreier, an energetic pastor from Germany, and his wife Almut, who both shared Donald's sense of urgency. They brought a welcome whiff of now unfashionable 60's revolutionary zeal. Dr Christian Troll became more conciliatory, but the quietly spoken Father Thomas Michel looked with suspicion at us and winced every time Donald took charge of the proceedings, especially at the final supper in the Topkapi Palace when Donald got everybody to rise from their seats and thank our hosts in traditional British fashion with a Hip Hip Hoorah! 'You can do better than that!' Donald remonstrated after the first half-hearted, self-conscious attempt. Then everyone shouted as loud as they could, much to the amusement of the waiters.

Most of our friendships were forged with Muslims, such as Eyup Besir from Germany who became our personal guide through Istanbul. He explained the history of his namesake's mosque in Istanbul. This was reckoned to be the spot of Job/Eyup's afflictions. He then pointed out to us the names of the nine prophets of Islam, the Sahabe, 'friends of Mohammed', carved on a tablet in the cemetery where they were supposed to be buried. The reason why so many people seemed to have lived amazingly long lives, hundreds of years according to dates marked on headstones,

was due to a discrepancy caused by the change from Islamic to western calendars at the time of Ataturk. Eyup Besir had been brought up in Germany He looked Turkish but spoke fluent German and behaved like a German paterfamilias. He took us under his wing and on the supper cruise up the Bosphorus pointed out the expensive residences, hotels, prisons, barracks and landmarks.

Over breakfast Cemal Usak told us his remarkable history. As a small boy he visited his father in prison. Incarcerated for political reasons the father was held there for many months. The son brought him tea, and became a mascot to the other prisoners who loved and protected him. Cemal Usak still looked liked a young boy, his eyes wide and pure in an ageless smooth-skinned face. He reminded me of those children in old fairy tales who enter dark forests and by their trusting innocence disarm the monsters they encounter.

Part of our tour of Istanbul took us to the ancient synagogue and the Patriarchate: the one standing at the centre of the Jewish quarter of the city, and the other hidden by a fortress wall. We were also taken to the Armenian Orthodox Cathedral, where the bishops and priests in their black pointy hoods sang a liturgy with powerful voices. We were listening to an ancient chant going back almost two thousand years. The Armenians were a testimony to survival in Turkey, given the attempt to remove them by genocide only a century ago. In fact the continuing presence of Orthodox and Jewish communities in their different parts of the city proved that Islam, even at the height of its conquest of the region, valued different traditions and allowed them to flourish. Eruptions of war and genocide can never entirely remove peoples.

By the final day most of the delegates who had arrived as strangers from every corner of the globe were well acquainted with our work. A number agreed to become members of another network, the Abraham Group, established at the symposium to

ensure that the insights shared there be turned into practical projects. Hartmut Dreier continues this project to this day, linking Istanbul with the Ruhr Gebiet in Germany.

When the symposium ended and before returning home, we visited the Sulejmanija Mosque, one of the largest and most celebrated in the city. It was built by Mimar Sinan, who designed the Ferahija Mosque. Sinan converted from Christian Orthodoxy to Islam, and became the most celebrated architect in the Ottoman Empire. Apart from his incomparable sense of harmonious design, colour and form he solved some fundamental architectural problems: in particular how buildings could support massive domes without reliance on hefty and unsightly buttressing which might disturb the aesthetic and spiritual needs of a place of worship. He had been inspired by the Hagia Sofia whose dome had for centuries been considered a marvel of ancient architecture. Colossal pillars support that dome along with two smaller domes. Sinan's Sulejmanija Mosque dispenses with the pillars and supports the vast main dome by resting it securely on four piers of graceful arches. This creates a magical effect of stone floating upward: an illusion enhanced by the ripple of numerous half domes and side aisles surrounding it. Light floods the spacious interior from scores of windows placed in groups at the base of each dome. The sense of harmony is enhanced by a lack of clutter, a yielding roundness, and warm rust colours. Even the elaborate painted patterns seem to grow organically from the interplay of shifting light on the variety of circular shapes that rise upwards like the motion of angel wings.

We expected the mosque to be crowded; in fact we were almost alone and a friendly cleaner took time off from hoovering the expanse of deep-pile carpet that covers the whole floor to show us around. He pointed out the spectacular views of the Bosphorus. The sparkle of light on the waters refracted through the windows onto the walls and designs of the mosque, as Sinan intended. Inner and outer light symbolise human relations with the divine, encourage an inner peace and aid contemplation of

the union with time and space. Sinan considered this building as being just ‘good workmanship’, but then like every obsessively productive artist he would be forever searching to improve and perfect. His career spanned half a century and he designed almost five hundred buildings.

Sinan’s Ferhadija Mosque might seem to have been no more than a miniature replica of the magnificent Sulejmanija Mosque, but those who were lucky to see it, while it stood, all remarked on its sublime beauty, the stillness and rapture it evoked.

People wonder why Donald an Anglican priest from a different tradition of worship and culture and I an artist with no involvement in the workings of any religious institution should be so intent on rebuilding a mosque. The question itself provides the answer. For Donald it is simply a matter of justice. For me as an artist it means reversing annihilation: saying a defiant no to that ever-present, negative part of human nature which denies the creative process of the imagination, wastes life and, in the matter of seconds, destroys what took time, effort, skill, and unique insight to bring into existence. Perhaps it has to do with our awareness of human fragility and vulnerability, constantly at threat from natural calamities, adverse climate, freak waves, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and collision with asteroids: disasters we like to call ‘acts of God’. This fear finds outlet in self-harm: the way a child painstakingly erects a pile of building blocks then, with a laugh of pride at its omnipotence, knocks the edifice down. Yet it is the child’s own work which is annihilated by that capricious stroke of the hand. Violent acts of vandalism can become a kind of forest fire, making space for new trees to grow. In my case as a learning artist, self-inflicted vandalism was a way of replacing and recreating: making better.

So we human beings painstakingly rebuild what we destroy, and continue to do so in defiance of the laws of nature and the universe. We know everything comes to an end even while we perpetually hope for transformation. So we create for eternity. That

gives us hope in the teeth of our fears. It is this hope that gives our existence meaning.

Hagar and Ishmael being protected by God in the wilderness calls to mind another universally known image of maternal love: that of Mary and Jesus making do in a stable ‘because there was no room in the inn’. That story has a particularly gruesome end with Jesus hanging like a common criminal from a cross. At the moment of conception Mary was so overwhelmed with hope that she burst into song; what we know as the Magnificat, envisaging a world made new, society turned upside down to make way for a more just world:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,

and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name.

And His mercy is on them that fear Him, from generation to generation.

He hath shown strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.

He hath helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,

as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

Luke 1:46-55 King James Version

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In 2004 we stood on the borders between Turkey, Iraq and Syria, a region which has become a permanent war zone. The refugee camps now covering the ground in 2014 make Mary’s expression of faith seem irrelevant, naïve, and absurdly defiant. Yet,

looking down from the walls of the medressa at Mardin across the plains of northern Mesopotamia, a place where Abraham set off on his journey three thousand years ago, the light-drenched emptiness reduced the crowds of people, soldiers, police, and eminent guests to insignificance. We were there in passing. We are here in passing. Ideas, vision and the imagination endure, along with the stones, the river tumbling down the mountainside, the wide sky above and dust stretching into the distance.

THE END OF DUST