**The Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide Possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation?**

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| **Jasmina Memisevic, Studienummer: 20104235****Vejleder: Brady Wagoner** | **10. Semester, Psykologi****Cultural Psychology****Aalborg Universitet****4. januar 2016** |

**Abstract**

This study aims to investigate how Bosniaks remember- and relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. In connection with this, it also aims to examine the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation among Bosniaks. In order to investigate this, four narrative interviews with Bosniaks are conducted in which the main focus is on Bosniaks' stories in relation the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. The Bosniak interviewees are survivors of the Bosnian war, and come originally from Srebrenica (or the surrounding area) of Bosnia Herzegovina. Moreover, three of the four interviews were performed with a Bosniak family that consists of a father, mother and their daughter. The last interview includes an interview with another Bosniak man, who has not only survived the Bosnian war but also the Srebrenica genocide. The interviews took place in the Bosniak interviewees' homes in Denmark and were primary carried out in the Bosnian language. In order to analyze the narrative interviews, thematic analysis has been applied, which is a methodological branch under narrative analysis. The four interviews and the subsequent thematic analysis of these, form the basis for the study's findings.

In general, the results of this study demonstrate that Bosniaks have negative remembrances of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide, since they have been exposed to dreadful events during the war, e.g. loss of family members, enduring injuries, living in hunger etc.. In view of these events Bosniaks have a general tendency to maintain a distance particularly towards Serbs. Apart from this, the horrible events have helped to unite the Bosniaks, because they are sharing a position of victimhood.

Further, Bosniaks relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide in a manner, where they preserve their joint Bosnian history by, among other things, attending the annual commemorations, and by transferring knowledge about the Bosnian war to further generations. Thus, Bosniaks' joint history is preserved across time by means of their collective memory.

Finally, the results show that Bosniaks are reluctant to the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation. Since Bosniaks are not willing to forgive at an intrapersonal level, it minimizes the possibilities for interpersonal forgiveness. The unwillingness with regard to intrapersonal forgiveness also stands an obstacle to the opportunities for reconciliation.

In the name of God, I dedicate this project to all victims of war and genocide.

I also dedicate this project to my beloved husband, my dear best friend and to my wonderful family, who all have given me the motivation and support to continue the journey of this project.

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# Introduction

Today, it is circa 20 years ago that the horrible event, characterized as the Srebrenica genocide or massacre, took place in Srebrenica in the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In connection with this, the annual commemoration was held in Copenhagen in 2015 in order to honor the victims of the war and genocide in Bosnia. This event is of great importance to Bosniaks, who are residing in Denmark, as many attend the annual commemorations. The annual ceremony in Copenhagen has been a particularly big event when compared to the previous years, as it at that time precisely was 20 years ago since the genocide. However, today is also 20 years ago since the Bosnian war ended, a war that even after so many years has made the relations between Bosniaks and Serbs widely disrupted and tensed. This tension is even expressed on the annual ceremonies that are held in Srebrenica, where the conflicts reappear. So although the war has ended, the memories of it still remain and have an impact on its survivors.

I myself have a Bosnian background, as I was born in Bosnia during the war. I have no memories from the war, but through my upbringing I have acquired some knowledge about it, which of course comes from my parents who have experienced the war at first hand. Through my upbringing I have gained an insight into how the war has affected my parent's lives and themselves, which is also why I gradually became interested in the current topic.

By writing about this topic, my intent was also to gain more knowledge about how Bosniaks remember the war with particular emphasis on their personal stories of the war. Through their stories it was possible to get a better understanding of how they relate to the war, and whether they are ready for forgiveness and reconciliation. So, through the research of this topic, my focus was not only on Bosniaks' stories from the past, but the focus also included a future-perspective, namely whether Bosniaks are ready to make a step forward; a step towards forgiveness and reconciliation.

Hence, the research questions of this study are the following: *How do Bosniaks remember- and relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide? Possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation?*

At the end of this section, it is also relevant to include a practical thing. The annexes are not printed, but instead they are uploaded on a CD-ROM that is attached. The CD contains an interview guide of questions to interviewees and interview transcriptions.

# Theory

The chapter includes both historical- and theoretical perspectives. The first part is concerned with historical facts regarding the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide in order to get an overview of what actually happened. The second part addresses key concepts in relation to the current topic, namely an emphasis on genocide, including forgiveness and reconciliation. The third theoretical part deals with collective memory, and including identity and the culture of violence. Finally, it is important to notice that the theoretical chapter appears general and broad, but theoretical perspectives will be applied later and connected in relation to the research questions.

## Part I: Bosnia and Herzegovina

### The Bosnian War

It is hard to imagine that one provincial town like Srebrenica, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH or Bosnia), has been a place for the greatest massacre in Europe since the one that happened during World War II (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). However, this massacre represents as well the breakdown of the international community of ex-Yugoslavia. Before we discuss the massacre in Srebrenica, it is essential to keep the focus on a broader historical context, namely on the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). When the communist control had its end in Central- and Eastern Europe, it was time for elections in 1990 in the entire Yugoslavia (which at that time consisted of several republics, as Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, etc.) (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). Overall, the election results showed that nationalist parties were the winners, which was also the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The three nationalist parties that have accomplished the majority of votes in BiH were the Party of Democratic Action (SDA, Bosniak), the Croat Democratic Community (HDZ) and the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). This event developed into a major problem for Bosnia. First and foremost it was threatened by territorial requirements from Serbia and Croatia (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012), where Serbia borders eastern Bosnia while Croatia abuts Bosnia in the western and northern part.

Secondly it meant a problematic disagreement between the nationalist parties regarding Bosnia's future (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). The Bosniak party SDA and the Croat party HDZ, including other smaller parties acknowledged Bosnia's autonomy in 1991. The Serb party SDS strongly resisted in recognizing Bosnia's autonomy (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). This resulted in that SDS in the year of 1992 declared parts of Bosnia to be "Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina", where they took the parts for which they considered to be Serbian territory (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). In the same year, the majority of Bosnian voters showed a support for Bosnia's independence. Again the SDS contradicted this by building barricades around the capital city Sarajevo. Subsequently the European Community acknowledged Bosnia as an autonomous land (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). This in turn led the SDS to declare their occupied parts of Bosnia as Serb Republic (RS: Republika Srpska). So this was a starting point for the conflicts and war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012).

During the war, the Serbian army found support among the Serb population in Serbia, after which they confiscated most of Bosnia. Along with the Serb offensive "ethnic cleansing" entered the war scene, which was performed in several communes of Bosnia (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). This led to further massive or selective killings mainly of men, sexual assault and rape of primary women and finally the beginning of concentration camps (such as the dreaded concentration camps of Omarska and Keraterm in the Prijedor commune) (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). According to Velid Šabić (2008) the attacks made by Serb forces were massive and heinous crimes particularly in eastern Bosnia, where they committed murder, plunder, persecution, depriving the Bosniaks properties and destroying religious buildings.

The previous section addresses the reasons for the beginning of the Bosnian war. The following section elucidates the happenings in Srebrenica during war, including the consequences of the Srebrenica genocide (or massacre).

### The Srebrenica Genocide

Srebrenica played a vital role in the war (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). Srebrenica, as well as other towns in eastern Bosnia, was in 1992 occupied by the Serb forces and since it borders Serbia, they wanted to acquire control over the area. Furthermore the Bosniaks from Srebrenica were also exposed to the same sufferings (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012) as mentioned earlier (cf. *the Bosnian war*). However, it was possible for the Bosniak combatants to regain control of Srebrenica. This resulted in that Bosniaks from other eastern towns fled to Srebrenica. Its population doubled from circa 30.000 inhabitants to circa 60.000 (Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). Indications of another attack by Serb forces were present, but UN pronounced Srebrenica (and other areas) as a safe area and protected by UN. In order to provide protection, Dutch and Canadian soldiers were sent out to Potočari (a village few miles from Srebrenica), where they had their base (Pollack, 2003; Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). Yet, in the month of July in 1995, Bosniaks in Srebrenica were attacked by Serb forces. Soldiers headed by General Ratko Mladić went into Srebrenica and in the next days they killed circa 8000 Bosniak men. That same year, a while after the massacre, the war was stopped by an agreement termed Dayton Peace Accord (Pollack, 2003; Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel, 2012). This agreement includes that Bosnia remains as a single country, but is separated into two parts. One part of Bosnia is the Federation, where both Bosniaks and Croats govern, and the other part is Serb Republic. Srebrenica is situated in the Serb Republic (Pollack, 2003).

The majority of the Bosnian refugees moved to temporary accommodations in the Federation, lived in houses that Serbs had left, some found their way to live in new apartments while others fled their country (Pollack, 2003). The number of Bosnian refugees living in Denmark are listed in Ankestyrelsen (the Appeals Board) and are considered to be circa 22.000, since the 90'es (Ankestyrelsen, 2014, p. 7).

To sum up, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a small country in Eastern Europe carries with it a tragic history of war, genocide and sufferings. The above is just a small attempt to explain and clarify the events during the war, including the genocidal crime primarily against Bosniaks. For many Bosniaks this tragic experience left a great impact and caused many of them mental and physical consequences. An example and a symbol of this tragedy is the town Srebrenica, where thousands Bosniak civilians were killed. Thus the history of Bosnia, is broadly for all Bosniaks of great importance, and for many it is a reminder of why they have fled their homeland. Simultaneously, the memories of the war and genocide have left a deep mark on the survivors.

The following section includes a definition of the concept of genocide with particular emphasis on the specific stages that occur during genocide.

## Part II: Defining key concepts

### Genocide

*Genocide* has been introduced by the jurist Raphael Lemkin in 1944, who has linked the Greek word 'genos' meaning race with the Latin word 'cide' for killing (Ingelaere, Parmentier, Haers & Sefaert, 2013). Furthermore the United Nations (UN) describes genocide in terms of five fundamental acts committed in order to eradicate an entire group or part of it. When speaking of the group, it refers to a national-, ethnic-, racial or religious group of people. Additionally acts of genocide include (Ingelaere et al., 2013):

 "(a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." (Ingelaere, Parmentier, Haers & Sefaert, 2013, p. 1).

These acts of genocide have been adopted by the UN in 1948, and since then, efforts have been made to prevent genocide (Ingelaere et al., 2013). These efforts involve, among other things, procedures of protection and creating institutions to prevent genocide. Other noteworthy efforts have been made in the judicial field, where genocide has become a punishable crime (Ingelaere et al., 2013). Furthermore, efforts are also highlighted through other initiatives and institutions, such as truth commissions, medias and memorials. This is an opportunity for victims to speak out, or even for the perpetrators. Furthermore these initiatives also intend to inform the next generations (Ingelaere et al., 2013).

In general when I started reading about genocide (and the Bosnian Genocide) I could not help but being confused about the difference between war and genocide.

Basically genocide has been acknowledged as a crime in connection with war and its preparations (Shaw, 2007). Additionally the crime meant a widening of the laws of war. However, genocide has been separated from war, because of its deviation from the legitimate warfare (Shaw, 2007). What distinguishes it precisely from war, is its systematic method of using violence towards civilian groups. This method crosses as well excesses such as war crimes or crimes against humanity (Shaw, 2007). Furthermore there occurs to be a special interest in studying the warning signs of genocide in order to be able to predict genocide (Baum, 2008).

According to Gregory H. Stanton[[1]](#footnote-1) (2013) genocide is a developmental process, which consists of ten stages. The first stage is *classification*, which takes places in each culture, contributing to a categorization of people into "us and them". This is manifested through several groupings; such as ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality (Stanton, 2013; Baum 2008), for instance as Serbs and Bosnian Muslims.

The second stage termed *symbolization* is when individuals ascribe names or symbols to the aforementioned categorizations (as when you call someone Gypsy or Jew) (Stanton, 2013; Baum, 2008). Furthermore symbolization includes distinguishing individuals based on their appearances (color or dress). The first two stages are considered to be a widespread human practice, which means that it is not automatically accompanied by genocide except if it reaches the stage of dehumanization (Stanton, 2013; Baum, 2008). The stage of *discrimination* develops when a leading group applies law, custom and political control to deprive another groups civil rights. Furthermore the leading group becomes stronger by excluding the weaker group (Stanton, 2013). The fourth stage is *dehumanization*, which means that one group treats the other group as inhumane. Here the "inhumane" members are compared to e.g. animals or diseases (Stanton, 2013; Baum, 2008). An example of depersonalization, is when the group gives its members numbers instead of their original names, as Jews experienced during WWII (Stanton, 2013). The formation of genocide also lies in the *organization* of it. Often it is the government that organizes genocide by unofficial groups (e.g. army units or militias) or by terrorist groups. These organizations are made in order to perform genocidal murders (Stanton, 2013; Baum, 2008). *Polarization* is the sixth stage and here radical individuals attempt to separate the groups from one another by making laws that prohibit communication or mixed marriage. First and foremost, reasonable members of the leading group are considered to be "dangerous" for the perpetrators, as they are capable of ending the genocide (Stanton, 2013). Therefore they are first on the list to be captured and murdered. Afterwards they arrest and murder the leaders of the opposite group. Furthermore members of this group are being deprived of weapons (no way of self-defense) and the leading group acquires complete control (Stanton, 2013). Moving on to the seventh stage termed *preparation*, where the chiefs of the perpetrator-group represent the victim-group as terrifying to their population. Furthermore they justify their purposes by applying words such as "ethnic cleansing", "purification" or "if we do not act, then they will destroy us" (Stanton, 2013). This preparation stage also includes constructing armies, training them and procuring weapons. In the next stage victims are being *persecuted* and excreted. Sometimes they unwillingly have to carry symbols that identify them (Stanton, 2013). Furthermore the victims' properties are taken from them, they are separated, transported to areas without any food- or water supplies or they are taken to concentration camps (Stanton, 2013). *Extermination* is the penultimate stage, where mass killings are performed openly; men are murdered and women are raped. Both cultural- and religious objects are destroyed in order to eliminate the historical existence of the group (Stanton, 2013). The last stage is *denial*, where the perpetrators of genocide take the corpses of the mass graves and set the corpses on fire. Thereby they attempt to remove any kind of proof in order to hide their crime. Additionally they deny guilty and instead they are accusing the victims (Stanton, 2013).

The ten stages are not necessarily moving chronologically, but instead some stages take place at the same time (Stanton, 2013). Of course, the stages are inter-related, as one stage occurs due to the previous stage. Finally, the stages do not just stop, but they proceed through the entire genocidal procedure (Stanton, 2013).

In short, genocide is defined as a systematic method for destroying a particular group of people. The next section includes an emphasis on the definition of forgiveness and reconciliation.

### Forgiveness and reconciliation

People frequently use the word forgiveness, but what does it actually mean when we say that we forgive?

*Forgiveness* is sometimes defined as the following: "*A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the underserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her*." (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998, p. 46-47). This definition addresses forgiveness from a spiritual angle, where forgiveness includes positive elements (Nwoye, 2009).

A somewhat different definition of forgiveness deals with forgiveness in terms of debt and the annulment of it (Exline & Baumeister, 2000, Nwoye, 2009). For instance, in a situation where a person hurts another person, it results in the creation of a so called *interpersonal debt* (Exline & Baumeister, 2000). A way to overcome this debt can be done by the innocent person who forgives, which leads to disappearance and deletion of this interpersonal debt that arose during the conflict between these two persons (Exline & Baumeister, 2000).

Generally, the previous definitions demonstrate that forgiveness helps the offended individual (who has been hurt) to change its attitude towards the offender, namely to a increased positive picture of the offender (Nowye, 2009).

Other researchers argue that forgiveness includes interpersonal- as well as intraindividual factors (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000, Nowye, 2009). So, once a human being forgives, there occurs an internal change (i.e. intraindividual factor) that is also socially beneficial, towards the offender (McCullough et al., 2000, Nowye, 2009). To be more precise, then intraindividual changes experienced by the forgiver are manifested through thoughts, emotions, actions and motivations (McCullough et al., 2000, Nowye, 2009). In case of the interpersonal factor, then forgiveness emerges due to a mutual resentment (e.g. when a person has experienced being deceived or attacked), where forgiving happens with respect to another individual (Nowye, 2009). The possibilities for forgiveness depend on how the offender perceives his own actions against the offended one (Nowye, 2009).

In order to understand forgiveness properly, it is essential to clarify the concepts that do not belong to the definition of forgiveness (Nowye, 2009). In most cases, forgiveness is separated from five concepts, which are the following (Enright & Coyle, 1998): 1) *pardoning* is applied in the judicial system, 2) *condoning* is when an individual justifies the crime, 3) *excusing* is when the individual rationalizes the crime it has committed, 4) *forgetting* means that the remembrances of the crime have faded and disappeared, and last but not least 5) *denying* is a refuse to acknowledge the injuries from which the person has suffered from (Enright & Coyle, 1998).

The previous section has dealt with the definition of forgiveness, but it is also important to focus on how to achieve forgiveness (Nowye, 2009). In order to reach forgiveness it is necessary to take three processes into account, namely (Gordon & Baucom, 1998): a) by acquiring a realistic picture of the occurred conflict, b) by not relating negatively toward the offender and being free from the desire of revenge, and finally c) by minimizing the wish to punish the other one (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). In connection with this, it is noteworthy to include mature forgiveness, which only can happen if both sides (i.e. forgiver and offender) cooperate with each other (Jenkins, 2006, Nowye, 2009). In order for mature forgiveness to occur, both sides must attend in dialogue (Jenkins, 2006, Nowye, 2009).

When referring to reconciliation, then forgiveness is needed in order to achieve reconciliation, but there exists also other necessary initiatives (Rutayisire, 2009). First and foremost, it is of great importance for the offended person to overcome and forgive, and secondly the offender must admit what he has done, regret the act, apologize and seek forgiveness (Rutayisire, 2009). For a successful reconciliation, the aforementioned initiatives must be carried out. In this way it results again in a healthy relationship, where both the forgiver and offender are friends and trust each other (Rutayisire, 2009). Additionally, reconciliation is also considered to repair the damaged relation between the forgiver and offender, but both of them must be receptive to this (Fincham, 2000). In general, forgiveness is a crucial step towards reconciliation (Orcutt, 2006). Hence, when individuals are willing to reconcile, it is necessary that they forgive, as reconciliation requires forgiveness. In contrast to this, if an individual only forgives, it is not obliged to reconcile (Yacoubian, 2009).

To sum up, the above defines forgiveness in relation to an annulment of debt, and forgiveness on the basis of intraindividual- and interpersonal factors. Additionally, reconciliation depends on an individual's willingness to forgive, but forgiveness can occur independently from reconciliation. Now, the following section highlights collective memory, first and foremost, in relation to identity.

## Part III: Collective memory

### Collective memory and identity

When it comes to collective memory, then "memory ...is knowledge from the past. It is not necessarily knowledge about the past." (Bell, 2006/2010, p. 2). What is meant here is that collective memory differs from individual memory, as it does not attach importance to accurate memories, but instead memories are to be debated and discussed (Wertsch, 2002). Additionally identity issues are examined as well in connection with collective memory. Researchers of collective memory look closely at how individuals create their own past and make use of it, in order to explore their needs, especially identity needs (Wertsch, 2002).

The term collective memory is coined by Maurice Halbwachs (1980/1992), who considers memory within a social framework. According to this assumption, memories always occur in connection with other people (Coser, 1992; Halbwachs, 1980). Even when a person is not physically surrounded by others, he or she still recalls social memories (Halbwachs, 1980).

Furthermore, individuals living in a society are always part of groups and these have an impact on their memories (Halbwachs, 1980). This assumption has been criticized, since individual processes of moving between groups are ways of remembering, and these are not taken into account (Wagoner, 2015).

Another approach on collective memory comes from James Wertsch (2002), who considers it as a form of mediated action. Here collective remembering is rather used than memory, hence referring to it as an act. Generally, mediated action is a reciprocal process, which consists of an active agent and cultural tools (Wertsch, 2002). So for collective remembering to occur, it is always necessary to include both the agent and cultural tools (Wertsch, 2002). Here collective memory is neither approached from a purely social- or psychological point of view; it is considered a distributed process, meaning that it is distributed across individuals, agents and cultural tools (Wertsch, 2002).

Narratives are considered as cultural tools, which individuals use to introduce settings, actors and events of the past (Wertsch, 2002). Narratives are not only discussed in relation to collective memory, but they also play a crucial role in relation to identity issues. In general, identity is explained on the basis of self-representations, also referred to as mental constructions, which relate to the persons we are (Bamberg, 2011). More specifically, it is a question of what the individual identifies with and how the individual is identified, which normally happens in terms of other individuals. Fundamentally, the relation between narration and identity lies in social interactions (Bamberg, 2011). We are already narrating individuals in our first life-years, as we engage in social activities and by doing this, we distinguish ourselves from others. Later we become more aware of life as an integrated narrative and this is the beginning of our identity development (Bamberg, 2011). There is a difference between narrating and narratives, where narrating refers to an activity performed in social interactions whereas narratives are tools for identity issues (Bamberg, 2011).

Collective memory has now been introduced on the basis of two perspectives. The first treats collective memory as a social phenomena, whereas the other perspective highlights it as a form of mediated action. Furthermore studies of collective memory focus on how human beings use their past to fulfill certain needs. For instance, human beings strive to explore their identities through the past. Another noteworthy concept in relation to collective memory and identity are narratives. Individuals narrate their past and thus their lives are constructed of narratives, which in turn shape their identities.

The following section takes collective memory and the culture of violence into account.

### Collective memory and the culture of violence

In a society, where violent acts are performed and human loss is experienced, has a great impact on the members of that society (Bar-Tal, 2003). Additionally if this continues for a long period, all these experiences of violence that are stored in collective memory, will have a crucial influence in the social order (Bar-Tal, 2003). The development of a culture of violence is based on two interrelated factors. First and foremost, collective memory (of physical violence) is a breeding ground for a culture of violence to develop (Bar-Tal, 2003). Secondly, it is the culture that holds onto the collective memory of human losses, including negative beliefs about the enemy (e.g. inhumanity, evilness, etc.). This has an influence on the way members of the society consider the situation, and moreover it justifies the persistence of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2003). When a society experiences such loss and violent conflicts, it is very likely that a development like this takes place. Furthermore these experiences affect the members on an emotional level and are therefore of great importance to them. These happenings are also something that are reflected in the society through the society's products, institutions and the use of communication means (Bar-Tal, 2003). These are all means to preserve the experiences as collective memory. As a consequence of this, a cultural pattern occurs, which includes three elements (Bar-Tal, 2003).

The first one deals with *societal beliefs* relating to the intergroup violence. Here societal beliefs are described as perceptions, which are expressed among members within a society (Bar-Tal, 2003; Bar-Tal, 2000). These perceptions include various themes specifically related to the society, and in this way the society's members acquire a feeling of unity and uniqueness. When members are exposed to major experiences, it results in the creation and distribution of societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal, 2003). In general, societal beliefs deal with societal goals, collective memories, perceptions about others and themselves etc. (Bar-Tal, 2003). The continuation of physical violence is the reason why basically four themes of societal beliefs are formed, passed on and preserved (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal, 2003). These themes are as following: "beliefs about the conflict; beliefs about the de-legitimacy of the opponent; beliefs about the victimization of the own group; and beliefs about patriotism" (Bar-Tal, 2003, p. 85). Societal beliefs concerning the conflict include all collective memories (based on the experiences) that are associated with the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2003). Additionally they also point out the motives for the emerged conflict, including significant events that were part of the conflict (e.g. evil actions of the opponent). Finally the beliefs deal with what the group sacrificed for the conflict, especially the sacrifices of brave men (Bar-Tal, 2003).

Societal beliefs on the de-legitimization of the opponent include a negative perception of the opponent (due to the loss of civilian lives) and thus validates a rebellious behavior toward the opponent (Bar-Tal, 2003). Additionally, these opponents are appointed as murderers and hooligans, because they have gone far away from the boundaries of morality and humanity (Bar-Tal, 2003).

Another societal belief includes the victim status, which means that the group considers itself as a victim (Bar-Tal, 2003). These societal beliefs deal basically with the human losses, injuries and vicious acts committed by the 'other'. Thus the opponent is to be blamed. Additionally human loss is a motivation for societal beliefs of patriotism as well and contributes to that the group feels proud and devoted for its own country (Bar-Tal, 2003; Bar-Tal, 1993). These and similar beliefs are encouraging individuals and increases their patriotism towards the country to the extent that they are willing to make sacrifices for it (Bar-Tal, 2003). Moreover the society encourages such patriotic acts and pays tribute to all those killed and wounded, where they are regarded as heroes and patriotic examples. Then the new generations are taught of these past heroes (Bar-Tal, 2003).

Generally, the developmental process of these aforementioned themes depends on the duration and intensity of the violence during the intergroup conflict[[2]](#footnote-2). Usually the violent conflict is long-lasting, which means that the beliefs put a mark on the society, and thus turn into collective memory (Bar-Tal, 2003). Additionally they are expressed and shared through communication channels, socio-cultural- and educational institutions. Finally, these societal beliefs are stable over time, since they are included in various cultural products, e.g. in literature (books), art (paintings) and drama (movies) (Bar-Tal, 2003).

The second element includes *rituals and ceremonies*, which are being held in order to commemorate war and human loss. Rituals and ceremonies are for example speeches, parades, music, decorations and presentations about the conflict and its relevance, etc. (Bar-Tal, 2003). They also reflect the group's values and perceptions regarding the violent conflict. One way to prolong the conflict is precisely through rituals and ceremonies, where hostility is expressed and patriotic act are encouraged (Bar-Tal, 2003). However, it is said that the original purpose of rituals, ceremonies and memorials is to perpetuate and refresh the collective memory, but actually they help to prolong the society's collective memory indefinitely (Bar-Tal, 2003).

The last element, as part of the cultural pattern, are *monuments and cemeteries* that are raised in order to bear in mind the victims, who were killed in the conflict. Places, intended precisely for this, are permanent and thus help to maintain collective memories in a material form (Bar-Tal, 2003).

It should be emphasized that societal beliefs have a connection to ceremonies, rituals and memorials. Societal beliefs are presented and deepened on ceremonial- and ritual events, and in this way objects and actions become meaningful (Bar-Tal, 2003).

Finally, it can be summarized that collective memories of violence and human loss contribute to the creation of a culture of violence. Then again, the culture is the one preserving the collective memory. After a violent conflict and human loss, three cultural pattern emerge, namely societal beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, and monuments and cemeteries. In this way collective memory is maintained, but cultural patterns are also the reason why collective memory becomes permanent.

The next chapter is a methodological presentation regarding the conducted interviews with Bosniak survivors of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide.

# Methodology

The following sections consist of methodological considerations in relation to the conducted interviews and the applied method for analyzing these interviews. In general, this chapter attaches importance to the focus group of the current study, the searching process for Bosniak interviewees and the interview design. At the end of the chapter, the focus is on narrative thematic analysis, including a presentation of thematic maps. The very first section covers the focus group of Bosniaks.

## A qualitative study

### Focus group

Generally, the focus group of this study are Bosniaks, coming from Srebrenica or the surrounding area, who are currently residing in Denmark. Additionally, this study includes four interviews, which are the following: three interviews with a family consisting of a father, a mother and a daughter, and last but not least an interview with another Bosniak man. Halid, Amela and their daughter Selma (i.e. the family) are a focus group of this study, as they all come from Srebrenica. Both Halid and Amela have experienced the Bosnian war until they fled to Denmark in the year of 1995. Their daughter Selma has been present during the war, but she cannot remember it, since she was born in the war time. It has been important to include the interviewee Selma in this study in order to explore what she knows about the Bosnian war and genocide, whether her parents communicate their experiences on to her and what thoughts she eventually has in relation to the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation. Apart from the family, the study also deals with Kemal, who comes from Bratunac (a surrounding area of Srebrenica) and has also fled to Denmark in 1995. Unlike the family, Kemal has been in Bosnia during the genocide in Srebrenica. At the beginning this study included merely interviews with the aforementioned family, but after the interviews with the family I found a need to interview a person outside the family, as the interviews with the family appeared, of course, very much alike.

The above section defines the focus group, which this study is dealing with. The next section offers a brief description of the procedure for searching Bosniak interviewees for this study.

### Searching for Bosniak interviewees

When I searched for interviewees, I sent circa 20 emails to Bosnian organizations around Denmark. These organizations have only Bosniak members and organize social-, cultural- and religious activities for all audiences. Since I know that many Bosniaks are connected to these organizations, I thought that it would be the best and most effective way in finding the interviewees. Subsequently, I received a few responses back on mail, which I could benefit from. I received primarily responses from the Bosnian organization in South Denmark, who gave me the contact information of a family (Halid, Amela & Selma) who wished to participate in the interviews. The Bosnian man (Kemal), whom I initially had contact with (and who had given me the family's contact information) has also been willing to participate in an interview.

The following section covers the design of the interview(s); a description of the narrative interview, the formulation of interview questions and the proceedings of the interviews. It also takes into account ethical considerations and strengths and weaknesses in relation to the general interview design.

### The interview design

This study consists of four *qualitative interviews*, which highlight the interviewees' perceptions about the world and help to clarify the meaning behind their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Further, these qualitative interviews are also *narrative interviews* in which the emphasis is placed on the interviewee's story as well as on the happenings and structure of that story (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The stories can occur in two ways; 1) where the interviewee spontaneously is telling stories, and 2) where the interviewer leads the interviewee to talk about a particular topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). When the interviewer, who performs the narrative interview, wants to hear about a story from the interviewee, it is essential not to interrupt the interviewee but to let him/her speak (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is of course acceptable that the interviewer asks questions that help to clarify the story, and assists in the continuation of it (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviewer helps to create the story together with the interviewee, as he/she usually nods, listens and asks questions to the story (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The reason for choosing the narrative interview, in the first place, is to gain an insight into the stories (or narratives) of Bosniaks, who have survived the Bosnian war. By concentrating on the narratives of Bosniaks, it is possible to explore how they personally relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. Furthermore by conducting a narrative interview, it becomes possible to investigate how Bosniaks relate to the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation.

In connection with the narrative interview an interview guide has been designed for the Bosniak interviewees (cf. *interview guide*). The interview guide for Halid, Amela and Kemal consists of questions related to Bosniaks' memories before the war, the beginning of the war and the war itself. Additionally, the questions also concern the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation. Furthermore, the interview guide for Selma includes questions about Selma's knowledge about the war and hers stance to the war. The primarily role of the interviewer during the narrative interviews with the Bosniak family and Kemal has been to ask questions and listen to their stories. During the interview, the interviewer also attempted to ask open-ended questions in order for the Bosniak interviewees to open up, and just tell the stories they consider relevant in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. However, the interviewees did not always succeed in telling their stories spontaneously without having the interviewer asking questions in order to continue the interviews. This may be due to that the Bosniak interviewees have felt nervous and had a hard time talking about the war.

I as the interviewer agreed with the interviewees to perform the interviews in their homes. The first visit took place with the Bosniak family, and the second was held at Kemal's home. Before the beginning of the interviews, I explained in a greater detail about the current study and the interviews. In general, the interviews were held in the Bosnian language and took, more or less, ca. one hour. The interview with Selma was a short interview compared to the other interviews, as she could not tell stories directly from the war (she did not have memories from the war). Furthermore, I chose to interview the Bosniak interviewees each independently in order to gain an insight into their personal stories without being affected by the other interviewees. In order to use the interviews for this study, I decided to use recording instruments (sound recorder and camera). By using the camera, it was possible to get a visual experience of the interviewees e.g. the interviewees were crying. Due to practical reasons, Kemal was not filmed but only recorded.

Some ethical considerations in relation to the interviews are also taken into account. First and foremost, the interviews were held in the interviewees' homes, because their homes are comfort zones where the interviewees feel secure. This has been a very important ethical consideration, as the Bosnian war is a sensitive topic to articulate and touches the Bosniak interviewees very much. Although the interviewees were home, they were still nervous, but surely their homes have helped to reduce their nervousness.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier the interviews were mainly held in the Bosnian language, except for the interview with Selma, who were more comfortable with Danish. It has been incredibly rewarding to perform the interviews in Bosnian, as it is the interviewees' native language and thus for them it is easier to use the Bosnian language during the interviews. I as the interviewer speak Bosnian fluently, which is why I have taken advantage of this in order to reduce a possible language-barrier.

The third ethical consideration is more related to the Bosniak interviewees' personal information. As the interviewees did not wish their names to be announced in the study, I have blurred their real names and thus Halid, Amela, Selma and Kemal are Bosnian cover names. These names are used both in the current study and in the transcriptions.

Finally, I have found it very important to search for Bosniak interviewees that I myself do not know personally and have no relation to. As I have a Bosnian background myself, I have avoided searching for interviewees in the local area in order for the interviews to be as much as possible neutral and objective.

Generally, there appear both strengths and weaknesses in relation to the interviews and in the way in which the Bosniak interviewees are searched. Searching for the Bosniak interviewees through Bosnian organizations has been the most effective way in finding Bosniak interviewees urgently. At the same time, a specific group of Bosniaks has been found, namely cultural- and religious Bosniaks. This might be a weakness, as it excludes the other group of Bosniaks, who do not have a connection to the Bosnian organizations. Due to the study's deadline, I was not able to find Bosniaks outside the Bosnian organizations.

By applying narrative interview, there occur both advantages and disadvantages. As mentioned earlier, it has been difficult for the interviewees just to talk spontaneously during the interview and thus it was necessary for the interviewer to be more questioning. So the narrative interview attempts to give a more open interview, but it is not always possible to maintain an open conversation with the interviewee due to various reasons, e.g. the interviewee's nervousness or tension. Actually, it is not a direct criticism of the narrative interview, as there may be several reasons for why the interviews were not quite as open as expected for a narrative interview. Generally, all the interviews have been useful narrative interviews, but the interview with Kemal was particularly a successful narrative interview, where the interviewer did a more listening role.

A disadvantage of using narrative interview can also be illustrated through the interview with Kemal. As the narrative interview leads to a more open interview, the interviewee has a great opportunity to fall off track in relation to the study's topic, which is also the case of the interviewee Kemal. Sometimes, Kemal contributed with political issues in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide, which have not been relevant in relation to the current study. In this interview situation, the interviewer let the interviewee speak out, but tried afterwards to lead the interviewee back on the right track, namely on their personal experiences related to the war.

A general weakness in relation to the interviews is the use of recording instruments, which may have had an impact on the interviewees' responses. Another general weakness is the interviewer's influence on the interviews by asking questions and in general being a part of the interview situation.

Generally speaking, there occur several strengths in relation to the entire interview design. By searching interviewees through Bosnian organizations, I have also acquired a wide Bosniak audience, since a large part of Bosniaks do have a connection to these organizations. Furthermore, being a Bosnian interviewer has also been very beneficial to the current study, especially because I was able to use the Bosnian language in the communication with the Bosnian organizations and interviewees. Moreover, the course of all the narrative interviews went really well, where the interviewer helped the interviewees to get well through their stories, even though the Bosnian war has been a sensitive and hard topic to talk about.

A major advantage of using narrative interview in relation to the study's current topic, is its rich contribution of stories about the war and genocide in Bosnia. These stories are applied in the subsequent narrative thematic analysis, which gives a greater insight into the understanding of Bosniaks' narratives.

To summarize, then the narrative interview emphasizes the Bosniak interviewees' stories from the Bosnian war and is thus of crucial importance in order to answer the research questions. The next section addresses narrative thematic analysis, which has been applied in order to analyze the narrative interviews.

## Narrative thematic analysis

*Narrative analysis* consists of several methods that are applied in order to analyze texts, characterized by having a narrative structure (Riessman, 2008). Generally, all these methods explore questions related to what the data contains, as well as what is written and displayed visually in the data. When referring to *thematic analysis*, then this method of narrative analysis works mainly with the content of the data (Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, the most frequently selected method of narrative analysis is thematic analysis, since this method smoothes the progress of a researcher, and is at the same time an attractive method to use (Riessman, 2008). Practically speaking, thematic analysis is applied by searching for themes in the data, and thus thematic analysis contributes with a classification of a given data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, a *theme* says something essential regarding the data, which helps to answer a study's research question. Apart from this, a theme also reflects a common thread throughout the data-set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When using thematic analysis it is necessary paying attention to six essential phases. However, it should be pointed out that some phases include general tools for analyzing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six phases are the following: 1) a transcription of the data in order to achieve a greater insight into the data set, 2) coding the data, which is a classification and labeling of certain parts of the data-set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), 3) applying the codes from phase two by grouping them and thus creating possible themes, and this phase is also an opportunity to begin an early sketch of a so called *thematic map* that includes visual themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). 4) exploring whether the themes match to the data codes and in general to the complete data set, and the thematic map is continuously formed. 5) the themes are specified and clarified, and finally phase 6) where the analyst prepares a written analysis including important data examples, and in general has an overall focus on the research question while writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The foregoing six phases have been very helpful in order to analyze the interview data of the current study. Generally, thematic analysis is preferred when compared to other narrative methods, as it is necessary to keep the primary focus on the content of the narrative interviews, namely on the content of Bosniaks' stories in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. Additionally, thematic analysis is simple to operate with, and simultaneously the analyst goes into depth with the content of Bosniaks' stories.

To sum up, thematic analysis is a methodological pathway of narrative analysis, where a data's content is mainly of interest. The next section includes a presentation of data, where thematic maps of the data interviews are constructed.

## Presentation of thematic maps

The following illustrations are thematic maps that are constructed on the basis of thematic analysis of the study's data (cf. *narrative thematic analysis*). Each interview includes a final thematic map, and these thematic maps are presented briefly below.

#### Thematic map of interview 1

Figure 1 illustrates a finished thematic map, of interview 1 with the interviewee Halid where three main themes have been found, namely 1) *positive memories before war*, 2) *stressful events of the war* and 3) *forgive, but never forget*. Theme 1 includes following sub-themes: socioeconomic security and trust in people. Theme 2 consists of these sub-themes: genocide, negative feelings, community break-up and facing death. Theme 3 comprises the following sub-themes: forgiveness in the name of God, as well as preservation of the Bosniak identity.

**Figure 1: Final thematic map of interview 1**

#### Thematic map of interview 2

Figure 2 shows two key themes that have been identified from the data in interview 2 with Amela, and these are the following: 1) *losses of war and its consequences* and 2) *struggle for survival*. Theme 1 takes two sub-themes into account: responsibility and hard choices. Theme 2 includes the following sub-themes: human loss and grief.

**Figure 2: Final thematic map of interview 2**

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#### Thematic map of interview 3

Figure 3 demonstrates one main theme based on interview 3 with Selma (daughter of Halid and Amela): *negative effect of war*, and includes the following sub-themes: loss, knowledge about the Bosnian war and hatred.

**Figure 3: Final thematic map of interview 3**

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#### Thematic map of interview 4

Figure 4 is an illustration of three main themes that have been found based on interview 4 with Kemal: 1) *great trust towards Serbs before the war*, 2) *surviving the war and the Srebrenica genocide*, and 3) *forgive is forgetting*. Theme 1 consists of the following sub-themes: wealth and daily contacting Serbs. Theme 2 includes two sub-themes, namely uncertainty and mistrust, betrayal as well as struggle for survival. Finally, theme 3 contains of the following sub-themes: communicating the Bosnian history to his children, and criteria for reconciliation.

**Figure 3: Final thematic map of interview 4**

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Now, the data set has been presented and illustrated through thematic maps. The foregoing presentation of the data does not include a detailed description of the main- and sub-themes, as the themes are highlighted in a greater detail in the following analysis.

# Analysis

This analytical chapter addresses the aforementioned themes, created on the basis of the thematic analysis (cf. *presentation of thematic maps*) in relation to the research questions. Each interview is analyzed separately, starting with the first interview with Halid from Srebrenica.

## Interview 1: Halid from Srebrenica

### Positive memories before war

Halid is a Bosniak from Srebrenica, or to be more specifically he comes from a village very near Srebrenica. At the beginning of the interview, he talks about his life in the village before the war. Additionally, he refers to his life as quite normal and harmonious, where he lived with his family and worked in a furniture factory:

*"I come from a peasant family. Hmm, where we lived a normal and good life. Hmm, where I lived with my parents, two brothers and two sisters. And it was a normal life with everything until the beginning of war [..] I was employed and worked in a furniture factory for seven years"* (translated, annex 1: line 17-24).

Based on the previous quotation, it can be assumed that the war represents an enormous rupture and creates a clear dividing line in Halid's life; one side includes Halid's normal life in the village and the other includes the loss of this normal life. The question is what characterized Halid's normal life and which kind of positive memories were linked to the time before the war?

From the quotation above, it is clear that Halid appreciates the closeness of being with his family and having a stable job. From this it can be deduced that Halid perceived his life before the war as a positive time characterized by security, cohesion and stability.

Halid continues to state that he had known his wife 7-8 months before the war and that they got married just before the war started (circa five months before) (annex 1: line 24-25). It might be assumed that being newly married is characterized by joyful feelings; falling in love, happiness, and things might seem very much idyllic. Thus, the time before the war constitutes positive memories.

Halid emphasizes that there were no threats before the war and that people trusted the government and that it would fulfill the interest of the Bosniaks (annex 1: line 28-29, 32-36, 41-43). Additionally, Halid stresses that he and his family were not prepared for the war, as they believed that it would never become a reality (annex 1: line 65-69). From these, it can be analyzed that the time before the war included hope, trust and optimism, which illustrates memories of the past, before the war, as positive.

To sum up, Halid describes the time before the war as being very positive as it involved stability, cohesion, trust and hope. However, it can be questioned whether these illustrations of the past are in line with how it has actually been like before the war. For example, it is relevant to notice that Halid was newlywed just before the war, which might have affected how he perceived his life-situation. As argued previously, this might be one of the reasons why Halid has a positive and idyllic picture of his life before the war. Nevertheless, Halid is referring to actual facts regarding his life before the war, which can be characterizes as positive. So even though there might been idealized conceptions of the past (before the war), there have also been objective facts suggesting positive aspects of the past. However, it cannot be avoided that these perceptions of the past are affected by the major rupture that the war led. If you had asked Halid 25 years ago (before the beginning of the war) he might have perceived his life-situation completely different than now. Therefore it is important to highlight how the war has affected Halid's attitudes towards his and other Bosniaks life-situations. This leads to the next theme of the analysis; namely *stressful events* *of the war*, which are presented in the next section.

### Stressful events of the war

Halid's first encounter with a stressful event during the war takes places in his house in the village, where he and his family are asleep, but they are awakened by the sound of detonations and shelling. Subsequently, he and his family run out of the house in panic, where he realizes that the shelling is falling on his house and onto the village (annex 1: line 48-54). Based on this, it might be assumed that Halid did not expect that such an attack would happen, since it occurred very suddenly while he had been unprepared. Thus it is assumed that this event is a major shock for him, which results in fear and panic of losing his life, family and home. Additionally, this chocking experience is Halid's first stressful event of the war, and marks a clear line between his normal life and the beginning of war (which he now has experienced at first hand). So this stressful event can be described in terms of fear, panic and abruptness.

The event, described above, is followed by a number of similar events, and thus Halid becomes acquainted to see people suffering and dying. Furthermore, he mentions that he has lost seven family members, hit by one grenade. At the same time as these events occur, Halid also struggles, together with his family, for survival, especially because they are lacking of food- and water supplies (l. 115-117, 135-136, 161-162). These occurrences have become a major part of Halid's everyday life in Bosnia and involve sufferings and struggles to survive. Based on the previous, then Halid has almost been a daily witness to stressful events of the war; namely the killing of civilians including his own family members, which almost certainly have led to the feelings of sorrow, grief and pain. Furthermore, it may also be that Halid senses fear and uncertainty, as he is confronted with death and does not know whether he will be alive tomorrow. Moreover, he also experiences many days of hunger and spends much time searching for food (l. 148-149), which indicates a struggle for survival. Hence, these events might be signs of fear, insecurity, hunger and loss.

In the beginning of the war, many women and children had fled from the village, which Halid has been concerned about, as he did not hear from them again and he did not know how they were doing (l. 117-121). This suggests that his community in the village is gradually dissolving, which causes him concern and uncertainty. Further, he stresses that everything has become disrupted during the war, especially his sleep routines, as he is no longer able to distinguish night from day, and v. v.. Halid does not have a normal life anymore, where he can brush his teeth and go to sleep (l. 126-129), implying that his daily routines are interrupted. All of this might also indicate a longing for the community he now has lost and thus a longing for the normal life he had before the war. In general, the stressful events of the war, mentioned so far, also represent changes in his life situation (hunger, concerns, uncertainty, fatigue and disrupted routines) and surroundings (community break-up).

Halid focuses strongly on one major event that he has experienced during the war; He is out and searching for food in another village, where he steps on a stone instead of stepping into a brook, since he has bad shoes. He does not know that a mine is located under that stone, after which the mine explodes and injuries both his right- and left leg (l. 174-178, 189-190). He gets first aid and is transported to the hospital, where he undergoes an amputation of his left leg, without anesthetics (or any other medicine) and with the use of a hand saw of metal (l. 168-170, 207). First of all, this portrayal is perhaps a manifestation of the general situation during the war, where there is no longer a safe place in Bosnia, regardless of whether you choose to stay at home or go out. However, this stressful event is characterized by a great personal loss for Halid, as he loses his left leg and thus a part of his own body. This event can also generate a vulnerability in him, because he is no longer able to help his family as before (e.g. searching for food). In spite of this, he demonstrates great courage and strength in order to maintain his own life. At the same time, he clearly faces death and does not know whether he will survive the amputation. Halid stresses that there was a time under the amputation, where he could not stand it anymore: "*I know, I did not lose conscious, I have been conscious all the time [during the amputation]. Yes, hmmm, I was yelling, struggling, yelling, struggling, yelling, struggling, and at once, something inside me, something in my organism, but I think it was the heart, it wanted to burst, it was not able anymore [to withstand]. And I am telling the doctor, that I cannot any longer*." (translated, annex 1, l. 214-217). This suggests that Halid went through a major pain, where he actually was close to death. In relation to this, he also puts an emphasis on his friends, who were with him in the hospital until he started screaming, which is why they went out as they could not bear hearing it (l. 225-228). This demonstrates that the amputation has been a tough struggle of survival, which he had to endure without the support of friends and family. When Halid spoke about this event during the interview, he started to cry and needed a few minutes before he could continue, which is an expression of great emotional pain related to the event. Finally, this stressful event is characterized by loss, unbearable pain, vulnerability, fear of dying, and strength to survive.

Halid remembers one specific date, namely the 18th. of march in 1993, where his wife Amela and daughter Selma fled from the village (l. 250-254). This positive event has been a great relief for Halid (l. 250), which indicates that he has worried much about his wife and daughter; perhaps even more than he worries about himself.

The fact that they fled without him could also bring relief, because he is no longer capable of taking care of his family, especially now that he is disabled and needs help. The escape does not represent a stressful event, but rather it is a result or consequence of all the stressful events happened to Halid and his family so far. This event might be characterized as relief and rescue.

Apart from all this, Halid also expresses his views about the war, including the underlying reasons for the massacre in Srebrenica. Halid stresses that he felt as a special animal trapped in a cage, in Srebrenica, where he has been fed, watered and cleaned (l. 283-284). Further, he explains that he and other Bosniaks were trapped, where the chetniks (radical Serbs) were above them, UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) was inside in Srebrenica, and in the evening they got a small package of food thrown down from the plane (l. 283-285). This is an excellent example of how Halid perceives Serbs and UNPROFOR. His notion indicates mistrust and suspicion towards both of them, as he has felt being treated inhumanely by both of them. Halid might have felt that his own life has been controlled by Serbs and UNPROFOR, and thus his survival depended on their decisions. When Halid explains what happened in Srebrenica in 1995, then he compares the situation of Bosniaks in Srebrenica with hunts on pheasants, where the hunt has been on Bosniaks instead (l. 297-299). Thereby he perceives Bosniaks as a specific group, hunted and killed by Serbs (l.301), which also indicates a notion of genocide against Bosniaks.

Hence, for Halid the Bosnian war and the happenings in Srebrenica represent genocide, inhumanity and distrust.

Based on the above, Halid describes his war experience as a very hard period, first of all, characterized by fear, panic and uncertainty. It has obviously been a struggle for survival, where he experienced hunger and loss. The next analytical section will deal with Halid's attitudes to forgiveness, where these information will be transferred to a more general assumption about how the Bosniak community relate to the point of forgiveness.

### Forgive, but never forget!

During the interview, Halid emphasizes what he has learned from his experiences during the war, which he also communicates to his daughter and son. First of all, he stresses that he trusted people before the war and he had friends of different national backgrounds (annex 1, l. 316-317). This information illustrates a positive memory of the life before the war (cf. *positive memories before the war*), which included trust in other people. When the war came, Halid saw that it was the friends he trusted, who attacked him. So he was basically backstabbed by his beloved "friends". Because of these experiences, Halid finds it very important to keep distance to people (l. 321), implying that one should not trust anyone fully. Based on the previous it can be argued that Halid may find it hard to forgive, because he keeps distance to other people. This distance suggests that Halid is having a hard time trusting other people and letting them entirely into his life again, why he has difficulties to forgive. Since he shares these personal beliefs with his children it also suggests that he has developed a method to protect himself and his family, namely keeping distance to other people.

Halid continues to state that it is important for him to teach his children to remember their backgrounds; who they are, what they are and where they are coming from (l. 321-322). When Halid speaks about the background of the Bosniaks, he does not precisely determine what this means, but indirectly he speaks about a Bosniak identity. This has to do with the fact that the Bosniak group is characterized by being Muslim from Bosnia, in which all their members identify themselves with. This is the point that becomes important to transfer to the next generation (they have to be aware of their history and background). The fact that Halid passes on the history of the Bosniaks to his children helps to preserve the Bosniak identity in spite of whether they are living in Bosnia or not. One might assume that there has been a shift to the content of the Bosniak identity; you no longer have to be a Muslim from Bosnia in order to become a Bosniak, but instead you need to have Muslim ancestors coming from Bosnia. This means that there are Bosniaks all over the world (and new ones are born every day) where they have a common bond to each other through their joint history/background. It is relevant to look at how Halid relates to the question of forgiveness and how this view is passed on to the next generation.

In the interview, Halid states that he would be capable of forgiving if the person who has put the mine under the stone came forward with an excuse. However, Halid continues to say that, even though he might forgive he would never be capable of forgetting the incident (annex 1, l. 350-352). This viewpoint could also support the assumption that Halid is very occupied by preserving the Bosniak identity, as he is not willing to forget (e.g. Halid and his family participate in the annual ceremony to mark the genocide during the war, l. 330-332). Here it is relevant to highlight how the question of forgiveness is transferred to the next generation of Bosniaks. It can be argued that even though certain Serbs would acknowledge and apologize for the happenings during the Bosnian war, it would not change much for the Bosniak community. This has to do with the fact that such certain excuses are not given to the Bosniak community as such, but instead to single individuals. It can be argued that in order for the Bosniak community to forgive, they need an official excuse that relates to all of them as a group. This might be achieved by receiving an official excuse by the Serbian politicians in the government in which they acknowledge the criminal events during the war (the genocide) and sincerely apologize for these. An interesting question in this respect is whether the Bosniak community would be willing to put aside what happened during the war? One might argue that the Bosniaks would certainly not forget the events during the war, since it would require that they give up their Bosniak identity that is, among other things, characterized by remembering and preserving the Bosniak history. It can be discussed whether one (including Halid) is able to forgive if he/she is not willing to forget, but this is an aspect which will be processed later in the project (cf. *possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation*?).

In the interview, Halid mentions one more important aspect when it comes to the question of forgiving, namely religious motives for forgiving. Halid states that people are different from each other and that God has not imposed man to live in hatred. In this respect Halid continues to argue that for religious reasons, it is good to forgive (l. 346-347, 352). From these statements it can be argued that Halid has some religious guidelines for forgiveness which he tries to live up to.

To sum up, Halid has two considerations when it comes to the point of forgiving; cultural- and religious reasons. As mentioned before being a Bosniak includes, being a Muslim from Bosnia, which implies a specific cultural- and religious combination that also becomes relevant to the question of forgiveness. Thereby Halid, and Bosniaks in general, have certain requirements for forgiveness.

The above section has dealt with Halid's attitudes towards the themes; *positive memories before the war*, *stressful events of the war* and *forgive, but never forget*. In the following section the focus will turn to Halid's wife Amela in order to elucidate how she remembers the Bosnian war.

## Interview 2: Halid's wife Amela

### Struggle for survival

Amela stress that she got newlywed and pregnant in the beginning of the Bosnian war (annex 2, 18-19). When Amela was six months pregnant, the accident happened where Halid got injured by a mine bomb. So all of the sudden, Amela was in case of frustration as she had to take care of her injured husband as well as her unborn child. She used a lot of energy to walk back and forth between her home and the hospital in order to visit her injured husband (l. 66-71). Amela did not have the opportunity to receive proper care; not even from the hospital when she was in labor. Instead the doctor and nurses at the hospital were busy helping injured war victims and therefore Amela did not receive proper help when she gave birth to her daughter (l. 53-56). Based on this, then Amela experienced a lot of responsibility where she had to struggle for survival, as she had to make a lot of sacrifices.

Amela continues to elaborate on how she had to make some hard choices in order to survive. Because when bombs were falling during the war, people had to seek cover in shelters that were placed in the basements were the temperature was very low. Amela was in a dilemma because she could not bring her newborn child to the shelter as it was too cold (zero temperatures that could kill her child). However, it was also a huge risk to let her child be outside the shelter, but that was a risk she felt obligated to take (l. 58-61). So even though Amela felt a motherly responsibility towards her child, she decided to leave her child upstairs (as it was more likely that the child would survive upstairs) while she was seeking cover in the shelter. Once again Amela had to make some big sacrifices in order to optimize her and her child's chances for survival.

Amela further explains that the food supplies were lacking and therefore her and her family experienced hunger. She gives an example with her mother-in-law, who had fed Amela's daughter with some tea (a white gaze was used as a pacifier) as there was a lack of food supplies, including milk for the child (l. 71-74). Because of the lack of food supplies, falling bombs and the beginning of the genocide in Srebrenica, Amela felt obligated to flee in order to survive. So Amela flees with her daughter from Srebrenica to Tuzla, which is another city located in Bosnia where it was more peaceful (l. 108-111). All of these happenings have put Amela in a situation where she struggled with uncertainty regarding the future and was forced to take some hard choices in order to survive. When Halid and Amela were reunited in Tuzla, Amela finally felt some rest by knowing that her and her family have made it so far. In the year 1995, Amela, Halid and their daughter fled to Denmark, where they got asylum. But even till this day Amela struggles with some losses of the war, and these will be presented next as well as the consequences they have led to.

### The losses of war and its consequences

Amela begins the interview by referring to her childhood where she in an early age lost her mother, who died. She then continues to talk about some of the losses, she suffered during the war, where her father and brother were brutally killed (annex 2, l. 13-15, 87-89, 96-97). Thereby the war became a symbol of loss, where Amela lost the rest of her close family. Beside losing her brother and father, Amela also lost many other family members as well as friends, during the war (l. 98-99, 301-305). Amela emphasizes that it has been very hard for her to accept that these people were viciously killed and that their corpses have never been found. It has especially been hard for Amela that she did not have the opportunity to bury her own father and brother. This has to do with the fact that she lives in a state of uncertainty, since she does not know what happened to her father and brother and where their corpses are located (l. 331-335).

The losses of the war have brought major consequences for Amela, where she has lost her family and found herself within a state of loneliness and grief. Amela misses being able to be together with her father and brother (who often used to visit her) and she struggles by the fact that she only has the memories of them left.

Another struggle for Amela is the fact that she has lost a huge part of her people (i.e. Bosniaks) (annex 2, l. 195-198), which has contributed with consequences of losing the coherence among Bosniaks. When Amela talks about the loss of coherence among Bosniaks, then she refers to the genocide in Srebrenica. The annual commemorations (both in Bosnia and Denmark) means a lot to Amela and she makes a great virtue out of participating in these ceremonies each year (l. 351-352). An interesting point about these ceremonies, is that they are not only held in order to remember the victims, but also to bear in mind the perpetrators and their crimes during the war and genocide in Bosnia. The reason for focusing on the perpetrators has to do with that the Bosniaks do not want to forget who the perpetrators are and what they have done. The Bosniaks have a sincere hope that the perpetrators will be put to trial some day and therefore it becomes very important for them to keep the memory of the perpetrators alive. For Amela it also becomes important to use the annual commemorations in order to transfer knowledge about the war to her children and to the next generation in general (l. 351-357).

Amela emphasizes that she does not believe in hatred and revenge, but finds it impossible to forgive the crimes finding place during the war (l. 280-285). In this respect she mentions that she does not feel hate or a need to take revenge on the perpetrators, but neither can she reconcile with the perpetrators (l. 300-305). She puts a lot of energy in emphasizing that she is not able and will never be able to forgive the crimes during the war, and the people responsible for these crimes, as she does not trust these people (l. 260-262). This aspect is interesting in regard to how she transfers her assumption about forgiveness and reconciliation to her children. An even more interesting aspect is how her children absorb her assumption about forgiveness and the war in general. In order to elaborate on this aspect, the next section will deal with Amela's daughter Selma, and how she relates to Bosnian war.

To sum up, this section has dealt with some of the struggles that Amela has been through during the war. Amela has been forced to take some tough choices in order to survive, which has also affected her later on. For example did Amela lose close family members and the Bosniak community that she had before the war. The character of the criminal events during the war have been so great that Amela finds it impossible to forgive the crimes and the perpetrators.

## Interview 3: Daughter Selma

### Negative effects of war

Selma is the daughter of Halid and Amela, who with the help from her mother, has survived the Bosnian war. Selma was a little child when she arrived in Denmark in the year of 1995. Today she is 22 years, a young woman who does not remember the war, but is still affected by the consequences of the war (annex 3, l. 6-12). Selma's parents have told her a lot about the actual facts of the war, but they have not told her much about their personal experiences during the war (l. 15-16, 41-42). Selma has also gained knowledge about the Bosnian war through multiple medias (the news), annual commemorations and through conversations when Bosnian guests are visiting (l. 50-54). When Selma talks about the Bosnian war, she especially refers to the Bosnian genocide, where Bosnian men and women were separated, where the woman were raped and the men shut (l. 15-24). On a personal level, Selma has been affected by the war, as her father was mutilated and her grandfather and uncle were killed during the genocide. Furthermore Selma has to deal with the fact that her parents are marked by the war and that they will be marked for the rest of their lives. Because of these consequences of the war, Selma feels a close relation to the happenings in Bosnia, even though she has no personal memories from that period of time. However, Selma sees herself as part of the Bosniak victims, since she has physically been in the war till she was ca. two years old and has lost close family members (l. 90-92, 100-103). Additionally, Selma has developed a general hatred to Serbs, as she sees them being responsible for the crimes during the war. She is well aware of that not all Serbs have been involved in committing the crimes, but she is still maintaining a general hatred to all Serbs and this hatred appears automatically (l. 30-32). One might wonder about Selma's feeling of hatred towards Serbs when her own parents in general do not believe in hatred and attempt to teach her and her brother the same. In this regard, an interesting question arises, namely how it may happen that a young woman who has no memories from the war, feels such a general hatred towards Serbs, while her own parents, who have survived enormous sufferings and trials during the war do not hate Serbs (cf. interview 1 & 2). This is an essential question, which will be discussed later on in the project (cf. *possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation*?).

Selma also emphasizes that she never will be able to forgive Serbs because she has suffered a great loss of family members (primarily from her mother's side of the family) (l. 167-172), which she never got the opportunity to get to know. Additionally, the loss of family members is also one of the reasons why Selma actively attends to the annual commemorations in order to honor the victims and support their relatives; especially the Bosniak mothers, who have lost many male family members during the genocide (l. 60-64). The annual commemorations clearly help to preserve the remembrances of the Bosniak victims and they pursue the knowledge about the Bosnian genocide on to the younger generations, including to Selma and her brother. Selma also considers it very important to pass the knowledge on to her own future children, which she will do by taking them to the annual commemorations (l. 119-121).

Finally, the annual commemorations also play a central role in relation to the prospects for forgiveness and reconciliation, as the commemorations are a gatherings point from which Bosniaks join together in the memory of the Bosnian Genocide. These ceremonies have a great impact on the future generations of Bosniaks, as they affect Bosniaks' attitudes towards forgiveness and reconciliation. The following section deals with the themes of the final interview with Kemal from Bratunac.

## Interview 4: Kemal from Bratunac

### Great trust towards Serbs before the war

Kemal originally comes from a suburb to Bratunac, called Glogova, which is a part of the Srebrenica region (annex 4, l. 4-6). Kemal is the youngest brother out of his five siblings and he was married in the year of 1989 (l. 9-11, 13-14).

Before the war, Kemal had a great upbringing and a good family life. He did not suffer financially and he and his family used to have contact with Serbs through work and school. Glogova is bordering Serbia, which made it naturally for Kemal and his family to spend a lot of time in Serbia and with the Serbian people (l. 9-13, 26-27). Before the war, people did not divide into national groups, but instead they lived together peacefully side by side. Actually Kemal's best friends have been Serbs and he felt a general trust towards Serbs. Because Kemal and his family had been wealthy, they often helped their Serbian neighbors with food supplies and money (l. 20-28). Furthermore Kemal performed military service and worked in Serbia until the beginning of the Bosnian war. Kemal had heard rumors about Serbian activists who had committed hateful crimes towards Bosniaks in other parts of the country. Kemal could not believe that these rumors were true, as he felt a general trust towards Serbs. However, these disturbances affected Kemal who became concerned, which is why he stops working in Serbia (l. 40-46).

To summarize, Kemal had a great relationship to his Serbian neighbors and friends, which maintained a general trust towards Serbs. When Kemal heard rumors about the crimes committed by Serbian people, he questioned the validity of these rumors, because it did not correspond to his own experiences with Serbs. However, these rumors worried Kemal and he stopped working in Serbia.

With time the Bosnian war developed and in the following section, it will processed how Kemal was surviving the war and the Srebrenica genocide.

### Surviving the war and the Srebrenica genocide

During the interview, Kemal refers to an event happening on may 1992, where Serbian military surrounded his village under the pretext of collecting illegal weapons (annex 4, l. 64-68). Kemal found it very suspicious that the Serbian military specifically went after Bosniak families to investigate whether they had weapons, and therefore he chooses to flee into the mountains (l. 77-78). From Kemal's actions it can be analyzed that he must have started to believe in the validity of the rumors he had heard, namely that some Serbs have started to attack Bosniak families and forced them to flee. While Kemal is in the mountains, he starts to seek some clarification on what is going on (rather than acting after vague presumptions), and therefore he turns back towards his village. However, on his way back Kemal and his two friends got captured by Serbian military (l. 77-80). A chairman from the Serbian military commanded them to surrender, turn in their weapons, and inform the rest of the Bosniaks, who were in the mountains to do the same. Moreover, Kemal and his friends were commanded to report themselves to the captain in charge (l. 82-87). Kemal and his friends started walking towards the captain's location 500m away, when one of his friends expresses that there is something wrong. This friend tells Kemal that he knows the chairman, and says that he is not to be trusted. Kemal's friend expresses fear of getting killed if they report themselves to the captain, and therefore they choose to cross a river and flee back to the mountains once again (annex 4, l. 87-93). Until the beginning of May Kemal has not believed in the rumors (about the Serbian attacks on Bosniaks), but gradually he begins to change his position, as the riots in Bosnia intensify. Kemal has felt a lot of uncertainties and dilemmas during this period, but he slowly begins to realize what is happening.

During the interview, Kemal continues to state that after he and his friends fled back to the mountains, they sought shelter by a woman, who housed other Bosniak men, who had also fled from the riots. On the 9th of May 1992, the woman informed Kemal and the other expelled Bosniak men that the Serbian military had set the surrounding area on fire (l. 301-304). At this point, Kemal fears that his village has also been sat on fire and therefore he fears for his family's life. In secret, Kemal tries to return to his village in order to assure his family's wellbeing. As Kemal reached the border of the village, he witnessed with his own eyes that the Serbian military were brutally murdering Bosniak men (l. 320-24). So, Kemal had no opportunity to enter his village and therefore he did not know where his family was and whether they were alive (l. 323-324).

After the 9th of May, where Kemal's home village was burned to the ground, he decided to flee to the neighboring village. But this village also became harassed by Serbian military and therefore Kemal and other expelled Bosniak men had to flee to the town of Srebrenica (l. 237-243). While Kemal is in Srebrenica, UN proclaims the town to be a safety zone and guarantees to protect the Bosniak men and woman. Soldiers from UN and UNPROFOR join together in collecting weapons from the citizens of Srebrenica in order to create a safety zone (l. 279-283).

By the year of 1993 Kemal is witnessing the first steps of the Srebrenica Genocide. At this point the Serbian military drops bombardments over a playground where many children got killed. The Serbian military approaches Srebrenica and puts pressure on the Bosniaks who had to retire gradually from their borders, as they have no weapons to defend themselves with (l. 286-293).

The 7th. or 8th of July in 1995, the Serbs started to attack Srebrenica once again. At this point the UN soldiers retired from their lines and surrendered to the Serbs, as they feared for their own lives (l. 333-337). By the 10th of July 1995, Dutch officers and NATO are planning an attack in order to put an end to the Serbian invasion on Srebrenica. In order to help the Bosniaks, NATO was planning to drop several bombs in a radius of 3 km from the border of Srebrenica and this was supposed to happen on the 11th. July 1995 (l. 341-351). However, Kemal explains that no such attacks had occurred, but instead NATO sent two flights with bombs over a lake (l. 579-580). At this point, Kemal and other Bosniaks waited for NATO's release of Srebrenica, but instead they were chocked to find out that Serbs had been given free access to the town. As the Serbs entered Srebrenica, they started to set the town on fire and panic was raising (l. 351-357). Kemal was experiencing that shells were falling everywhere around in Srebrenica, and therefore he and other Bosniak men had to flee back to the mountains once again. They agreed to flee towards Tuzla through dense forest area within the mountains (l. 362-365, 370-372). Through Kemal's and the other Bosniaks escape through the mountains, shells were falling once again and Kemal saw a lot of dead bodies through his way. For example, were people were slaughtered, as they were resting, and Kemal saw the terrifying pictures of these acts (l.552-557). During their escape through the mountains, Kemal and the other Bosniaks were lacking of basic needs such as food and water (the Serbs had poisoned some of the water in the lakes). After 12 days, they finally reached the town of Tuzla and Kemal was one of the lucky ones who made it through alive (l. 529-535). Through Kemal's experiences in Srebrenica and his escapes, it can be assumed that his journey is characterized by insecurity (e.g. which way to escape), unawareness (e.g. the wellbeing of his family), and hunger (e.g. lack of food- and water supplies). Kemal has struggled for survival, where he was put in several dilemmas and was physically- and mentally impaired.

By the 23th. of August in the year of 1995, Kemal was reunited with his family in Tuzla after three years of separation (l. 841-842). This family reunion in Tuzla must have been a great relief for Kemal, where he felt joy, happiness and contentment to see his family alive and healthy.

After all these horrible experiences during the war, Kemal gives an expression of great mistrust and incomprehension towards Serbs. He cannot understand that his Serbian friends and neighbors wanted rather to see him dead than alive. Further, he emphasizes that he did not believe or expect all this to happen (annex 4, l. 94-97). Now, imagine that we find ourselves in a situation, where our best friend or close neighbor, whom we have trusted fully and even helped outspokenly, becomes our greatest enemy overnight and instead of knocking at our door as a neighbor, he comes aiming to torture and kill us and our families. Kemal experienced precisely such a betrayal by his Serbian community during the war. This betrayal caused a complete breach of trust between Kemal and his Serbian network, which is why he does not wishes to be in contact with Serbs anymore (annex 4, l. 153-154).

Kemal also mentions who the main perpetrators are, where he refers to them as "local Serbs" (i.e. Serbs living in Bosnia, such as neighbors), since local Serbs were very familiar with the villages and cities in which many Bosniaks were living. In this way, it was easier to find and kill Bosniaks. Kemal continues to argue that some Serbs living in Serbia, who also participated in the war and genocide, were unable to know Bosnia just as well as local Serbs (l. 178-183). Again, this information represents for Kemal disloyalty and dishonestly by local Serbs, whom Kemal (and surely other Bosniaks) had confidence in, but instead he and other Bosniaks were backstabbed.

Moreover, Kemal finds it also important to add that not all Serbs were perpetrators during the war in Bosnia, as he does not want to hurt the Serbian man and his family who have supported and helped Bosniaks during the war (e.g. some Serbs were part of the Bosnian Army) (l. 221-225). Kemal adds further that these examples of Serbs helping Bosniaks during the war were rare, and he estimates all Serbs to be perpetrators in the area of Bratunac and Srebrenica, since Serbs did not come to help Kemal or warned him about the beginning of war (l. 237-240). From this it can be analyzed that Kemal to some extent does not generalize the entire Serbian community, but instead he advocates for individual responsibility. But Kemal generalizes the Serbs in Bratunac and Srebrenica, which is linked to the fact that he did not personally experience to be supported or helped by the Serbs.

Finally, Kemal does not only blame Serbs but also the "world", who according to him could have stopped the Bosnian war and genocide (l. 603-604). When Kemal refers to the "world", then it might indicate organizations such as UN, NATO and UNPROFOR, who did not help sufficiently. So, Kemal surely has felt left alone during the war and genocide and thus in the lurch.

To sum up, this section has dealt with Kemal's survival during the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica Genocide. Through his experiences, Kemal has developed a mistrust towards Serbs, which makes it interesting to examine whether Kemal is able to forgive and/or reconcile. This is an aspect, which will be elaborated next.

### Forgive is forgetting

During the war, Kemal has lost 22 male family members from the year of 1992 to 1995. As far as possible, Kemal and his family join the annual commemorations in Denmark and Bosnia in order to honor the memory of the victims of the Bosnian war. Furthermore, Kemal takes his two children to the escape route, which he fled through during the war (annex 4, l. 539-545, 669-673). The route Kemal fled through is very famous and is called "the road of death", which is the place where many Bosniaks were brutally slaughtered in dense wooden area in the mountains (cf. *surviving the war and the Srebrenica genocide*). By involving his children in the annual commemorations and showing them "the road of death", Kemal transfers information about the Bosnian war and genocide, including his own personal experiences. However, it is worth noticing that Kemal does not tell his children about how the war has affected him emotionally and he does not tell them about what he has witnessed during the war (l. 806-808). From this behavior it can be analyzed that Kemal transfers factual information about the war, but he also wants to spare his children from some horrible descriptions that he had been a witness to. Kemal teaches his children who he perceives to be the perpetrators of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. Furthermore, he encourages his children to keep distance towards Serbs, even though he recognizes that not all Serbs have participated in the crimes. Kemal does not want his children to hate Serbs, but he wants them to be cautious towards Serbs, as he does not think that they can be trusted (l. 808-811, 873-875). Kemal is afraid of hating, because he thinks it might lead to revenge and other things, which he might come to regret. Kemal also believes that his religion does not allow revenge, which is also a reason why he keeps distance to hatred and revenge (l. 929-932). Additionally, Kemal despises hatred and revenge, because he associates these with characteristics of the Serbian perpetrators, who were able to commit horrible crimes towards innocent people (l.725-729). Therefore it becomes important for Kemal not to hate and thus to transfer the same perception to his children.

During the interview, Kemal states that he never will be able to forgive the crimes of the Bosnian war, because he emphasizes that forgiving is forgetting:

*"...Forget? I will never forget. Forgive? I will never forgive. I will also transfer this to my children, which means that they must not forget, not forgive, because the one who forgives is the one who forgets...*" (translated, annex 4, l. 933-935).

Therefore it becomes important for Kemal to teach his children, and further generations, who they are, what they are and where they come from. In this respect, he urges his children to integrate, not assimilate, in Denmark, because they have to remember their history and where they originally come from (annex 4, l. 933-935, 939-944). By this mean, Kemal wants further generations to hold on to the Bosniak identity, which includes remembering the terrible acts committed against Bosniaks and the victims involved (annex 4, l. 945-946).

In relation to the question of reconciliation, Kemal distinguishes between two kinds of reconciliation. He speaks about *forced reconciliation* as a forced acceptance of the current condition between Bosniaks and Serbs, who must live side by side in Bosnia (l. 973-975). Kemal also speaks about a possible *official reconciliation* if: 1) the Serbian people- and government acknowledge their crimes during the war, 2) the Serb Republic get annulled and Bosnia Herzegovina will be reestablished, and 3) the perpetrators of the Bosnian war will be held accountable (l. 993-1000). Kemal argues that an official reconciliation will not be possible as long as the Serbian people do not feel guilt and they stop honoring the perpetrators as heroes (l. 1010-1012). Although Kemal's criteria for reconciliation will be redeemed, he will not be able to reconcile on a personal level (l. 1027-1030). This has to do with that Kemal connects personal reconciliation with forgiveness, which will eventually lead towards forgetting. Since Kemal will not forget, he will not be able to forgive and therefore he cannot attain personal reconciliation.

Based on the above descriptions, it is obvious that Kemal is not able to forgive the crimes committed during the war and the Srebrenica genocide. However, Kemal is open for a possible reconciliation if certain criteria's are granted.

Until now the analysis has dealt with Halid, Amela, Selma and Kemal's relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. The information from the analyzes will be held up to the theoretical section of the current study in order to create a theoretical analysis and discussion that will be used to answer the research questions.

# Theoretical analysis & discussion

This chapter includes the following sections; 1) collective memory and the Bosniak identity, and 2) the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation?.

## Collective memory and the Bosniak identity

As argued previously, collective memory is socially mediated. There exists a passive- and active form of collective memory; the first referring to memory being socially constructed and the second dealing with remembering being a social act. In relation to collective remembering being a social act, it becomes an active form by using cultural tools through e.g. narratives and language (cf. *collective memory and identity*). Based on the analysis, it is clear that Bosniaks have a general tendency to use narratives concerning the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide in order to define themselves. In this respect, Bosniaks have an active approach to collective memory where they join common narratives in relation to the Bosnian war. According to Bamberg (2011) identity is linked to mental self-representations that define an individual. Furthermore it is argued that identity includes a social aspect where it becomes relevant how the individual is identified through others and what the individual identifies itself with (cf. *collective memory and identity*). In relation to the current project, it becomes relevant to examine what characterizes the Bosniak identity and how Bosniaks relate to this identity. According to Halid the Bosniaks are characterized by being Muslims from Bosnia. In this respect Halid refers to a Bosniak identity, where it becomes important to remember who you are, what you are and where you are coming from (cf. *Forgive, but never forget*!). Here it is relevant to take a look at how Bosniaks define themselves as a group and how they distinguish themselves from other groups such as being a Bosnian. As argued before, Halid defines a Bosniak as being a Muslim from the country of Bosnia. However, being a Bosnian does not necessarily require being a Muslim, which makes the preference of religion, less important. All Bosniaks are Bosnians, but not all Bosnians are Bosniaks. So the great difference between being a Bosniak and being a Bosnian, is a matter of religious preference even though both groups have the same national backgrounds. This information is significant to the question of how people relate to their joint history in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide.

By taking a look at the analysis, it is relevant to elucidate how Bosniaks transfer their joint identity to the next generations. According to Halid it is crucial that the next generation remembers the Bosnian history, including what happened during the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide (cf. *forgive, but never forget!*). Amela emphasizes that the next generation should attain knowledge about the Bosnian war by joining annual commemorations, so that the history will not be forgotten (cf. *the losses of war and its consequences*). It is also very important for Kemal to inform the next generation about the war and genocide by involving them in certain traditions, such as participating in the annual ceremonies and "the road of death". Furthermore Kemal emphasizes that the next generation has to remember their history, and where they originally come from. For Kemal it is acceptable that the next generation integrates but not assimilates in a new country, because they have to remember and maintain who they are, what they are and where they originally come from (cf. *forgive is forgetting*). Please note that all of the interviewees put an emphasis on the same aspects when it comes to maintain the Bosniak identity and transferring it to the next generation. This could illustrate a general tendency that Bosniaks identify themselves with the history of the Bosnian war and Srebrenica genocide, where it becomes important to remember the people/ ancestors being exposed to the crimes during the war. However, it is interesting that the information being transferred to the next generation seem generally to focus on the national aspect rather than the religious one. Based on this information, it can be argued that the next generation is brought up with a Bosnian identity rather than a Bosniak identity. For some the question of religion plays a significant role, but from the current study it seems like there is a general tendency that the nationality has a higher priority. This might indicate that there has occurred a identity shift from perceiving oneself as being a Bosniak to being a Bosnian. This argument suggests that those people defining themselves as Bosniaks put a conscious emphasis on their religious practice, which is not necessarily the case of those who are defining themselves as Bosnians.

Based on the above it can be argued that those who are related to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide have the opportunity joining together in a collective Bosnian identity (not solely a Bosniak identity). The collective Bosnian identity is therefore characterized by people gathering to remember and maintain the Bosnian history. But what does the Bosnian history cover more precisely? It is noteworthy that when referring to the Bosnian history, people (e.g. Kemal and Halid) usually focus on the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. However, the Bosnians have an even longer history that seems to be overlooked. Therefore it can be argued that there has also been a general shift in the collective identity of the Bosnians. This argument suggests that being a Bosnian before the war is different from what it means to be a Bosnian after the war. In order to illustrate what it means to be a Bosnian before the war it is relevant to focus on Halid's and Kemal's narratives where they report about their lives before the war. Halid's memories before the war were primarily positive, constituted by a stable family life and work. Kemal describes his life before the war as being a time where people trusted-, helped- and cared for each other. In this way Bosnians identify with certain characteristics (e.g. loyalty, mutual acceptance and trust) that were mainly positive before the war. However by looking at the Bosnian identity after the war, it almost seems like Bosnians identify with factual history concerning the war and the sad position that Bosnians were put in. From this it can be argued that there has been a shift in the characteristics of Bosnians from being positive to negative, where the Bosnians now identify themselves with victimhood. By taking the position of victimhood, it can be assumed that the Bosnians have rejected their former collective identity (characterized by e.g. loyalty, mutual acceptance and trust). Instead they have replaced it with a new one, where Bosnians now join in their national group (as opposite to mutual acceptance) and keep distance to other people due to suspiciousness (as opposite to trust and loyalty). Before the war, it seems like Bosnians were limited to a certain group of people coming from Bosnia. What now defines you as a Bosnian is not whether you were born and raised in the country of Bosnia, but rather it is determined by whether you have ancestors coming from Bosnia and a relation to the Bosnian war and Srebrenica genocide. So it can be argued that the Bosnian identity has shifted from being ambiguous to become more specific/ delimited. It can seem paradoxical that when Bosnians were limited to a specific country, they were not that bonded to each other through their national backgrounds. After the war, the Bosnians were spread to all corners of the world, but are now more united than ever. This might have to do with that the war has uplifted the Bosnians and contributed with a clear collective identity where the Bosnians are now united as a group.

To sum up, the Bosnian identity after the war is characterized by taking the position of victimhood, where it becomes important to remember those sacrifices that the Bosnian people have gone through during the war and genocide. In this respect, the repercussion of the Bosnian war and Srebrenica genocide have united the Bosnian people as a group, and determined how they relate to their common past. From this it can also be assumed that the Bosnian people might share a common perception about the question of forgiveness and reconciliation. This aspect will be processed in the next section below.

## Possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation?

As previously argued, forgiveness is considered to be a release of an interpersonal debt. Furthermore, forgiveness requires that the person who has been wronged changes his attitude towards the offender (cf. *forgiveness and reconciliation*). In this regard, it becomes relevant to distinguish between interpersonal- vs. intrapersonal forgiveness (cf. *forgiveness and reconciliation*). In the case of interpersonal forgiveness it is important for the offender to acknowledges his wrong actions and that he regrets and feels remorse for these. However, in the case of intrapersonal forgiveness there is not necessarily a requirement for the offender to acknowledge and regret his wrongdoings. This has to do with that intrapersonal forgiveness concerns internal changes where the individual changes his thoughts towards (independently from) the offender (cf. *forgiveness and reconciliation*).

By having a look at the analysis of the current study reveals that the question of forgiveness is a common theme among the interviewees. According to Halid, he would be able to forgive his offender (the man putting the mine under a stone) if he came forward and excused for his crime (cf. interview 1: *forgive, but never forget*). Turning to Amela, she emphasizes that she will never be able to forgive the perpetrators of the war, as she does not any longer trust these people (cf. interview 2: *the losses of war and its consequences*). So for Amela it becomes irrelevant whether the offenders regret and feel remorse for their wrong actions, since her trust towards the perpetrators of the war cannot be restored. According to Selma (daughter of Halid and Amela), then she stresses that she will never be able to forgive Serbs, because of the loss of family members during the war (cf. *interview 3:* *Selma*). Here it becomes interesting that Selma does not distinguish between being an average Serb and being a responsible perpetrator who committed crimes during the war. Consequently, Selma is not able to forgive any Serb, as she imposes a joint responsibility to all Serbs for what happened during the war. So according to Halid's family, then there are disagreements in relation to the question of forgiveness. Halid would be able to forgive his offender (after receiving an apology), Amela will never forgive the perpetrators of the war while Selma will not be capable of forgiving Serbs in general. When turning to Kemal, it becomes clear that he will not be able to forgive either, as he has experienced a major breach of trust from Serbs (cf. interview 4: *forgive is forgetting*). From the above arguments it can be assumed that Bosnians have a general tendency to avoid interpersonal forgiveness as the counterpart (perpetrators, Serbs) is not willing to recognize their crimes and feel remorse for their actions. Nevertheless, it will be relevant to examine whether there are possibilities for intrapersonal forgiveness in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide.

The results of the current study do not indicate that there is a breeding ground for forgiveness on an intrapersonal level. However, from above it has been stressed that Halid is open for interpersonal forgiveness, which would require intrapersonal forgiveness as well. This has to do with that in order to forgive another person completely one must be willing to forgive internally (intrapersonal). So when Halid does not refuse the possibility for interpersonal forgiveness, it also includes an openness towards intrapersonal forgiveness. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that interpersonal- and intrapersonal forgiveness are not necessarily separated from each other, but instead they overlap. It is interesting that Halid has an openness towards forgiveness which is not the case with the other interviewees. By taking a look at the analysis (cf. interview 1: *forgive, but never forget*) might reveal that Halid's openness towards forgiveness is linked to his perception about religion. Halid argues that his religion encourages him to forgive and not to take revenge. Thus, for Halid religion might represent an idealization that urges him to forgive on an intrapersonal level. In this respect it can be argued whether Halid is actually capable of forgiving on a personal level or whether his thoughts about forgiveness expose his idealizations of what he wishes to do. For Kemal the question of forgiveness in relation to religion takes on a different approach. Kemal argues that his religion (the same as Halid: Islam) urges him to avoid hatred and thereby revenge as well (cf. interview 4: *forgive is forgetting*). So for Kemal, religion allows him to avoid forgiveness as long as he does not hate, which becomes the idealization. Based on the above arguments, it is clear that Halid and Kemal have different idealizations (based on religious principles) which influence their possibilities for forgiveness on an intrapersonal level. However, from the interviewees, it seems like there is no (minimal) willingness for intrapersonal forgiveness and consequently this must prevent possibilities for interpersonal forgiveness as well. So from these arguments it is clear that there are minimal possibilities for now-living Bosnians to forgive the crimes committed during the war and the Srebrenica genocide. In connection with this, it is relevant to focus on why there seems to be such a great resistance towards forgiveness.

The analysis of the current study illustrates that some of the interviewees link forgiveness to a willingness of forgetting. However, the Bosnians are not willing to forget the crimes committed during the war and this prevents them from forgiving (e.g. interview 4: *forgive is forgetting*). The Bosnian people make a great virtue of remembering their joint past by practicing certain traditions such as annual ceremonies (cf. *analysis*). In the theory section of the current study, it is described that when a group experiences a major conflict (e.g. war), they will naturally start to create rituals, ceremonies, monuments and cemeteries in order to commemorate the conflict and human loss (cf. *collective memory and the culture of violence*). The reason for creating such practices has to do with societal beliefs that create a sense of unity and uniqueness among members of the society. As described earlier: *"Societal beliefs are presented and deepened on ceremonial- and ritual events, and in this way objects and actions become meaningful"* (cf. *collective memory and the culture of violence*: Bar-Tal, 2003). The case of the Bosnian war confirms the above described theory, as Bosnians also practice ceremonial- and ritual events (e.g. annual commemorations, the road of death, etc.) in order to create a common sense of societal beliefs. By maintaining the above described practices the Bosnian people refuse to forget what happened during the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. The question is then: as long as the Bosnians are not willing to forget will there be any possibilities to forgive?

As described previously in order to forgive, an individual must be willing to change its personal attitude towards the offender. This does not necessarily include the willingness to erase memories of the offender's unfair acts. However, in order to forgive, a person must be willing to avoid referring to the conflict (committed by the offender) and furthermore a person must be willing to change his negative perception of the offender internally (cf. *forgiveness and reconciliation*). In the case of the Bosnian people, they transfer negative imaginations of their offenders (perpetrators of the war) which maintain them in a position of rejecting the possibilities for forgiveness. So the question of forgiveness does not seem to be whether the Bosnians want to forget the crimes committed by their offenders. Instead, the Bosnians' resistance towards forgiveness has to do with their resistance of changing their attitudes to their offenders. From this it can be hypothesized that in order for the Bosnian people to forget the crimes committed during the war, they have to be willing to change their attitudes towards their perpetrators. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the Bosnian people have to forget their history and what happened to them during the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. In this respect it becomes interesting to investigate whether there will be possibilities for forgiveness at some point in the future.

The results of the current study have illustrated that Selma seems to have greater resistance towards Serbs in general, than her parents do (Halid and Amela). If this tendency continues generation after generation where the hostility towards Serbs increases then it will be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to forgive. However, with time there might come a point of return where future generations of Bosnians demonstrate a willingness to change their attitudes towards Serbs. At this point there will not be a possibility for interpersonal forgiveness between the people directly involved in the war, as they have passed away long time ago. Instead, future generations have the opportunity to forgive on an intrapersonal level in order to reconcile with the Serbs. According to the theory of the current study, reconciliation presupposes that the offender acknowledges- and regrets his unjust actions. Additionally, reconciliation cannot be implemented without forgiveness, but forgiveness does not necessarily lead to reconciliation (cf. *forgiveness and reconciliation*). From this it can be concluded that reconciliation between Bosnians and Serbs will not be possible as long as the Serbs do not acknowledge- and regret their crimes during the Bosnian war. Furthermore reconciliation is not possible if the Bosnian people do not expose a willingness to change their negative attitudes towards the Serbs. However, from the current study it seems like the possibilities for reconciliation are far away. This has to do with that Selma (the new generation) has developed a general hatred towards Serbs and this to a greater extent than her parents. One might wonder why Selma has developed such hostility towards people (perpetrators of the war) that she cannot even remember. The reason for Selma's hatred towards Serbs might have to do with the information transferred to her through her parents, annual commemorations, etc.. As previously described, parents transfer factual information about the war to their children, and the fact of the war is also the main focus during annual ceremonies. In this respect, Bosnian parents do not involve their children directly in their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding the war but instead they keep silent. However, there is also a message through the silent behavior, where it becomes clear that the Bosnian parents suffer from the consequences of the Bosnian war. Therefore, Selma might have developed a direct hatred towards all Serbs as she notices how the war has affected her parents negatively. Consequently, Selma has also suffered from the war, as she has lost her former happy, trustful and optimistic parents. Instead she must now live with a general mistrust- and distance to other people (especially Serbs). The above arguments might explain why Selma (and the new generation in general) has developed a hate towards Serbs, as she has lost hope in a secure world. If the case with Selma shows a general tendency in the new generation which she is a part of, this suggests that the possibilities for reconciliation is far away.

To sum up, this section has dealt with the Bosnians' possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. From the section it has been illustrated that the Bosnian people are not willing to change their negative attitudes towards their offenders (perpetrators of the war) and therefore there is not a possibility for forgiveness and reconciliation. It does not seem like there is an opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation in the nearest future as the new generations of Bosnians appear to have developed a general hatred towards Serbs.

At this point, the current study has investigated the way Bosnians remember and relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. In this respect, it has also been elucidated how the Bosnians relate to the question of forgiveness and reconciliation. These information will now be presented in the conclusion in order to answer the research questions of the current study.

# Conclusion

The current study has aimed at investigating the way Bosniaks remember and relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. Furthermore the goal of the present study has also been to examine whether there are possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation among Bosniaks. In order to answer the above research questions, narrative interviews have been conducted with four interviewees (A Bosniak family and another Bosniak man). Based on the transcriptions of the narrative interviews, narrative thematic analysis has been applied in order to answer the research questions.

The results of the current study have illustrated that Bosniaks have a general tendency to suffer from the consequences of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. This has to do with the fact that many Bosniaks have lost family members during the war and have been exposed to horrible events (e.g. physical injuries and hunger). Due to these horrible events the Bosniaks have experienced a major breach of trust from those people they considered neighbors, friends and families. Consequently, Bosniaks now have a general tendency to keep distance towards other people (especially Serbs) in order to protect themselves. For the Bosniak people it also becomes important to maintain their collective identity by practicing their national ceremonies. There appears to be a general tendency that Bosniaks join together as a group by participating in annual commemorations where it becomes important to maintain- and transfer knowledge about the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. Finally, the war has contributed to a sense of coherence among Bosniaks caused by their position of victimhood.

Furthermore, the results of the current study have likewise illustrated that Bosniaks have a general tendency to reject forgiveness and reconciliation. This has to do with that the Bosniaks are not willing to forgive on an intrapersonal level which hinders the possibilities for reconciliation. As the Bosniaks are not willing to forgive on an intrapersonal level, there is a minimal probability that they are prepared to forgive interpersonally. However, the possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation might be achieved at some point in the future, where new generations of Bosnians are willing to forgive on an intrapersonal level. At this point, there is a breeding ground for possibilities for reconciliation between Bosniaks and Serbs.

To summarize, it can be concluded that the Bosniaks remember the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide in a negative way. The Bosniak people remember all their sacrifices and the horrible events that they were exposed to. These events have united the Bosniak people as a group due to their joint position of victimhood. Furthermore it can be concluded that the Bosniaks relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide in a way that their history will be maintained over time through collective memory. In practice, this is established by participating in e.g. annual commemorations.

Finally it can be concluded that Bosniaks are not willing to forgive and reconcile now and in the nearest future.

The next chapter takes into account a critical view of the current study.

# Critical view of the current study

The following section deals with a critical view of the current study's methodology and the results.

## Bosniaks vs. Serbs view on the war

The current study is concerned with the Bosniaks' perception of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. However, by only focusing on the Bosniaks' view creates source of errors, as the perspective of the Serbs has not been investigated. The reason for exclusively choosing the Bosniaks as the focus group has to do with a matter of time limit in relation to deadline. Furthermore the current study has focused on the Bosniak people as a group of victims caused by the Bosnian war. Therefore it became relevant to investigate how these people relate to the horrible experiences that they have been exposed to and how that has affected them. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to examine how Serbs relate to the Bosnian war and whether they find the question of forgiveness and reconciliation relevant. Further investigations are encouraged to elucidate this perspective.

Another aspect that is relevant to articulate is that some people question whether the Bosnian genocide has ever taken place. The current study continuously refers to the Srebrenica genocide and thereby it challenges the above assertion. However, it is not relevant to discuss whether the Srebrenica genocide is an event that has actually taken place. Instead it becomes important to elucidate how Bosniaks relate to that event which they consider as real.

Finally, it is relevant to notice that I as the writer originally come from Bosnia and that my family fled to Denmark in the year of 1995 because of the Bosnian war. Consequently, I have attained a subjective approach to theme through my upbringing. However, during this study I have tried to appear natural and objective as a scientist. Though it becomes relevant to notice that my personal background is of importance in accordance to source of errors.

## Qualitative- vs. Quantitative study

By conducting a qualitative study, it becomes possible to get a deep insight into the individual's phenomenological perceptions about a particular theme. This has been very useful to the current study as it became possible to explore how Bosniaks remember and relate to the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. However, it can be difficult to deduce generalizations from single interviews. By conducting a quantitative study instead will open up for the possibilities to find general tendencies among a broad variety of people. Nevertheless, it has not been possible to carry out a quantitative study in order to answer the current study's research questions. This has to do with that the current study seeks to explore personal narratives according to the Bosnian war which would be difficult to elucidate from a quantitative standpoint caused by the deadline. However, a quantitative study could have been applied but then the study would have taken another form. For example a quantitative study could be conducted by performing standard questionnaires with proposals for how Bosniaks relate to the Bosnian war (which they would have to confirm or deny). Nevertheless, the current study has taken a qualitative standpoint in order to get insight to Bosniaks perceptions about the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. So, the current study forms the foundation of knowledge about Bosniaks' relation to the war, and this information can be applied in future quantitative studies. By doing so, it is possible to explore whether the same results can be repeated in a larger group of Bosniaks, and thus it might provide a higher reliability.

Finally, the validity of the current study is high, as there is a qualitative focus on the interviewees' relation to the research questions. If the current study would take a quantitative approach, the validity would decrease, as there are no similar psychological studies in this particular area. Therefore, this current study contributes with new knowledge to the area, and future studies are encouraged to assemble more literature and knowledge to the area.

To sum up, the above sections address critical views of the current study with a particular emphasis on considerations in relation to the selection of Bosniaks as the focus group, as well as the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative. The next section offers a new perspective on the current study.

# Perspective

The current study focuses on the Bosniaks' stories of the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide. A new perspective that has not been elaborated in the current study, includes a focus on the psychological treatment of Bosniak refugees. In connection with this, I have performed an interview with the psychologist Mette, who works with traumatized refugees in the rehabilitation center in Aalborg. In general the center deals with refugees coming from many different countries, including refugees from the former Yugoslavia (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, etc.). The interview with Mette provides a professional insight into how the center has worked with Bosniak refugees, and in which way themes such as forgiveness and reconciliation have been articulated in a therapeutic frame. However, this perspective will first be elaborated at the oral examination.

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1. Professor in Genocide studies & Prevention at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution of George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, USA (Genocide Watch, About the President). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Inter-group conflict specifically relates to inter-ethnic - and international conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)