‘As if nothing ever happened’: massacres, missing corpses, and silence in a Bosnian community

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This chapter is based on a book-length study, currently in progress, on the dynamics of mass violence in a Bosnian community in 1941 and the post-conflict silence that emerged about some of the killings after 1945. Here, I deal with two subjects that are relevant to the ‘Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide’ project: first, the concrete methods of mass killing that various groups in this region employed, and specifically the symbolism and ramifications of how they treated the bodies of their victims; second, how these methods of killing, and treatment of victims and corpses, helped to create conditions for a post-war silence, in particular about the Muslim civilian war victims.¹ The main argument is that a micro-level analysis of the dynamics of local violence reveals a causal relationship between the encounters with corpses of victims and survivors of violence, and the triggering of further killings, whose scale and ferocity rapidly increased. This research suggests a new way in which scholars of mass violence can productively build on the insights of recent influential work on political violence, which has highlighted the importance of the local dimensions of that violence, and especially their frequent disjuncture with those of the ‘master cleavage’ of a conflict.² The discussion that follows shows that one fruitful path forward is to pay increased attention to a largely understudied dynamic of mass violence, particularly in times of civil war, which is largely discernable only at the micro level: the relationship between the warring factions’ experience with corpses,

particularly those of their relatives, neighbours, and fellow fighters, and the ebb and flow of mass killing.

The community in question lived in the Kulen Vakuf region of north-western Bosnia, approximately 50 km from the city of Bihać. On the eve of the Second World War, the municipality of Kulen Vakuf comprised a section of the Una River valley and its surrounding hills. In the valley were Muslim villages and the town of Kulen Vakuf. Its population was nearly entirely Muslim, while in the surrounding hills were many Serbian and a few Croatian villages.³ The community's pre-war history, though not without conflict, due in part to the agrarian question, which pitted Muslim landlords against their predominately Orthodox Christian tenants, reveals a long-term history of inter-communal peace and manageable discord. Prior to the Second World War, serious inter-communal violence had occurred only once in the region, during the peasant uprising of 1875–78.⁴ During the 1920s and 1930s, the population generally divided along religious and national lines when it came to politics.⁵ Yet most people were friendly with one another, in the host of venues that made up their everyday existence, such as the weekly Thursday market in Kulen Vakuf, and soccer matches, during which Muslim and Serb men played on the same teams.⁶

This changed with the German invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. The region was incorporated into the newly established Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, or NDH), whose fascist leadership, known as the Ustašas, was committed to creating a state exclusively for Croats. As for the many Muslims who found themselves citizens of the new state, the Ustašas considered them to be Croats of the Islamic faith. Aside from Jews and Roma, the main population who stood in the way of the Ustašas' vision of an ethnically pure Croatian state was the Serb Orthodox community, which comprised nearly one-third of the population.⁷

Archival documents indicate that at least fifty-one local men joined the Ustašas in the Kulen Vakuf region, of whom thirty-two were Muslim and nineteen Croat. These men constituted less than 1 per cent of the region's population of Croats and Muslims. While it is difficult to determine what exactly led each of these men to join, the evidence suggests that most were from relatively poor families and thus they appear to have been attracted to the Ustašas out of a desire to quickly attain material wealth, and in

some cases to settle personal scores with pre-war enemies among the Serb Orthodox population.⁸ Only a handful, such as the local Croat Miroslav Matijević, who owned a tavern in Kulen Vakuf, appeared to have had connections to the Ustaša movement prior to the German invasion.⁹

Initially, the leadership of the NDH considered a number of potential policies to deal with the large Serb minority, such as rapidly converting a sizeable part of the Serb population (aside from its educated elite) to Catholicism, to make them 'Croat'.¹⁰ It also sought to quickly expel large numbers of Serbs outside the borders of the state to Serbia, where the German army was ruling with a local collaborationist government. But the policy of transferring the Serb minority east proved difficult to realize in the context of the broader war. With the German army preparing for the invasion of the Soviet Union, it was not possible in the early summer of 1941 to devote sizeable resources to the deportation of nearly 2 million people considered to be Serbs. The NDH authorities were simply not equipped for the rapid transfer of so many people, nor were their counterparts in Serbia in a position to receive them, and the German army had more important priorities, given their mobilization to attack the Soviet Union.¹¹ The regional NDH authorities did attempt during late June and early July 1941 to transfer the Serb (as well as Jewish) population out of north-west Bosnia. Most notably, on 14 June they emptied the city of Bihać of those they considered to be members of these groups.¹² But it was much more difficult to implement the resettlement policy among the large number of Serb villages throughout the region. The NDH authorities thus looked to the heartland of their new state, which included north-western Bosnia, where the Kulen Vakuf region was located, and saw large numbers of Serbs whom they considered a threat. And so, by mid to late June, the regional NDH authorities in north-western Bosnia made the decision to use mass violence to physically eliminate part of the Serb population and to induce the rest to flee.¹³

Because they lacked strong popular support among the non-Serb population for committing mass violence against their Serb neighbours, the local Ustašas in the Kulen Vakuf region decided to carry out the bulk of the mass killing of Serbs at a pit about 10 km west of Kulen Vakuf, not far from the Croatian village of Boričevac. This way, they hoped that no one in the town would know where the killings were taking place, and no one would be able to discover the bodies. It appears that this strategy was designed to avoid alarming the non-Serb population, while sowing fear and uncertainty among

the Serbs who remained in their villages, and inducing them to flee the region. In addition to 'Croatianizing' the region, which was the most important objective for the regional and national political elites, the attacks on Serbs, and the hoped-for emptying of their towns and villages, was appealing to some local leaders and most Ustaša foot soldiers, who seem to have been more concerned with plundering Serb property. Beginning in late June 1941, the local Ustašas went to the Serb villages, arrested the most influential men, demanded money from them, and then murdered many with a gunshot to the head, and dropped their bodies in the pit. The Ustašas had reason to fear a popular backlash from local Muslims and Croats who opposed these killings. There were many instances between June and August 1941 of Croats and Muslims warning their Serb neighbours that the Ustašas were going to attack them. In doing so, they saved many lives.¹⁴

The Ustašas were unable to carry out all the killings at the pit, and ended up murdering a number of Serbs near the local Orthodox Church in the town of Kulen Vakuf, as well as near the town's primary school. They carried out these killings by cutting the throats of the victims, and they buried the bodies in shallow graves and ditches. They also killed large numbers of Serbs, not only men but also women and children, in a number of villages in the wider region, such as Doljani, Osredci, Bujanj, Nebljusi, and Suvaja. These killings often wiped out entire extended families, such as the Keča clan of Suvaja, of which the local Ustašas murdered 45 members on 1 July 1941, along with 116 of their neighbours. If the Ustašas did not manage to throw the bodies into pits, then they tended to bury them in shallow mass graves.¹⁵ In other cases, they left the corpses in the open. 'The bodies of men, women, and children killed on 2–3 July were laying everywhere', as one Ustaša described what he saw in a village in the region, 'which made for a terrible stench. Pigs and dogs were chewing on the corpses.'¹⁶ This created an atmosphere of 'infectious fear' among the remaining Serb population, who immediately fled into the nearby forests.¹⁷

The differing treatment of the corpses seems to have been dependent in large part on the ethnic composition of the population where the killings took place. In mixed regions, such as the immediate vicinity of Kulen Vakuf, the Ustašas tended to lead their victims away from the non-Serb population, many of whom did not support violence against their Serb neighbours, in order to kill them and then drop their bodies into pits, where they disappeared from view. Killing and disposing of the corpses in this way appear to

have been employed to avoid destabilizing the non-Serb population and provoking resistance. In regions where Serbs made up most or all of the population, by contrast, the Ustašas seem to have been much more willing to leave the mutilated and decomposing corpses in the open, so as to terrify the remaining Serb population, and, it was hoped, to induce them to flee, thus 'cleansing the terrain'.

After such massacres, local NDH military personnel wrote reports to their superiors in Zagreb, noting that sometimes survivors would return to their villages after the mass killings – which they euphemistically referred to as 'cleansings' – only to discover horrific scenes with bodies. 'This has created fear among the people, as well as indignation, all of which makes any kind of reconciliation [between the Serb and non-Serb population] unthinkable'.¹⁸ One can only imagine the experience of finding the murdered bodies of parents and siblings, with limbs being chewed off by livestock and dogs. For one local man, who as a ten-year-old endured finding the bodies of his mother and younger brother in this condition after a massacre in July 1941, it was simply 'the greatest tragedy that could happen to a person'.¹⁹ NDH military analysts noted the dramatic results of these 'Ustaša cleansing actions' on inter-communal relations: 'It is difficult to conceive of collective life of the Croat-Muslim part of the population with the Serb part. The chasm that now exists is too big'.²⁰ Thus, in a matter of weeks, the violence of the local Ustašas shattered the long-term, inter-communal bonds of friendship and neighbourliness that had existed for many in the region. They accomplished this by brutally murdering at least 600 Serbs in the Kulen Vakuf region between late June and late July 1941. The first victims were mostly men, and especially merchants, village elders, heads of households, priests, and others of influence, but later waves of killing included many women and children.²¹

The mass killings of Serbs caused the Serb survivors to organize an insurgency at the end of July 1941. Shortly thereafter, the Communist Party issued a call for an uprising. The local guerrilla fighters, who referred to themselves for the most part as 'insurgents' (*ustanici*), immediately overran at least four villages and towns, killed several Ustašas and other NDH police and military personnel, burned their commands to the ground, and captured their weapons and ammunition.²² They attacked more villages during the last few days of July, with varying degrees of success.²³ However, the handful of Serb communists in the Kulen Vakuf region encountered difficulties trying to organize the peasant insurgents into a unified guerrilla army. Their numbers were exceptionally small

and they lacked the necessary authority that other prominent local Serbs had, such as former gendarmes and military officers. None of these incipient insurgent units in the region had Communist Party organizations during the summer of 1941.²⁴

Another point of tension was the issue of collaborating with Muslims and Croats. The communists hoped that fighters of all nationalities would join the uprising and fight together for the liberation of the country and socialist revolution. But for many of the Serb insurgents, their Muslim and Croat neighbours, only a small number of whom had joined the Ustašas, had now become their main collective enemy. Many of the Serb survivors of the massacres that the Ustašas committed suddenly viewed all Muslims and Croats as Ustašas, which instilled in them an intense desire to exact blood vengeance on their non-Serb neighbours.²⁵ Encounters between local Serbs and Croats during and after Ustaša attacks in the region earlier in July attest to these sentiments. In the village of Bubanj, where Ustašas, among whom were several Muslims from Kulen Vakuf, had murdered at least 150 Serbs on 3 July, local Croat villagers remembered hearing from surviving Serbs: 'You Croats are now filling bottomless pits [*bezdanke*] with us, but when our time comes we will do the same with you'.²⁶ This pledge to take revenge became real during attacks on a number of Croatian villages in late July and early August 1941, when Serb insurgents burned the villages and massacred all Croats, including women and children.²⁷ The massacres vividly revealed how little control the small number of communists had over the revenge-seeking peasant fighters. As one insurgent remembered after the attack on the village of Vrtoče: 'Hatred toward the Ustašas and the desire to take revenge on them for the relatives and friends [of the insurgents] they had killed dominated during the attack'.²⁸

During these killings the Serb insurgents treated their victims and their corpses in ways that deserve closer examination in order to better understand what fuelled the intensity of violence in the region, and shaped its dynamics. In some cases they sought to physically obliterate the Croat community, as in the village of Brotnja, where, at the end of July, they rounded up nearly the entire Croat population, who all happened to be of the Ivezić family, and proceeded to throw them one at a time, while still alive, to their deaths in a deep vertical cave.²⁹ But often they tortured their victims before finally killing them, such as a local Catholic priest in the village Krnjeuša, whose nose and ears they cut off, and whose eyes they poked out. They then locked him and others inside a Catholic

church and set it on fire, which finally killed all of them. In order to take revenge, the insurgents sought out the relatives of Ustašas who had killed Serbs, and in some cases made a point of mutilating the bodies in ways that would sow fear and anger. In one case, they captured the father of Miroslav Matijević, the local Ustaša leader in Kulen Vakuf who had been the main organizer of the violence against the Serb community in the region earlier in the summer. They cut off his head. They then placed it on top of a stick that they carried around the village of Vrtoče while killing others, including his wife, and at least eight further members of his family.³⁰

The symbolic meaning of placing the head of Matijević's father on the stick can be better understood if one situates the act within the context of the history of violent practices in the region. The Ottoman authorities, as well as the local *kapetani* (Muslim military commanders who were in charge of the fortifications along the Ottoman–Habsburg military border) in the Kulen Vakuf region, used such techniques on those whom they considered to be enemies, including both Christians and Muslims. This was not merely a way of executing an enemy and taking revenge; it also was a form of communication with the rest of the population, designed to transmit fear, to clearly show who was in control, and to publicly demonstrate that the enemy had been killed in a shameful and humiliating way. Beheading had been standard practice in the Kulen Vakuf region at least through the first third of the nineteenth century. The head was placed on a stick and then positioned on or near the site of an Ottoman military fortification to look like a gravestone, which would be visible to all local villagers. Being executed in this way, and having one's head displayed on a stick, was considered to be a disgrace.³¹ Based on the nearly identical style of execution of Matijević's father in early August 1941, and the subsequent placing of his head on a stick, it seems as though the insurgents preserved the memory of these Ottoman-era practices and employed them to take revenge on their neighbours and humiliate them. As for the rest of the Croats whom the insurgents killed in the village of Vrtoče, they made a point of killing most by cutting their throats in the same way they would slaughter their livestock, as most of these Serb insurgents were peasants who made their livelihoods from animal husbandry. This method may have been simply rooted in the lack of ammunition among the Serb insurgents; but it may also have been a way of reducing their victims in death to the level of animals, which could be seen as a further humiliation.³²

What these killings and mutilations demonstrated was a complex mixture of discriminate and indiscriminate violence, to use the distinction of the political scientist Stathis Kalyvas.³³ On the one hand, the insurgents chose very specific targets, such as the local Catholic priest and the father of the local Ustaša leader, whom they viewed as intimately connected to the Ustašas and the local Croat community. They made a point of killing and mutilating each in very horrific and public ways, which communicated a sense of fear and humiliation, as well as disgracing their enemies. On the other hand, these discriminate acts of violence seemed to set the stage for what quickly became mass indiscriminate killings, in which the insurgents sought out their victims less because of their perceived connection to the Ustašas, and more because of whom they understood their victims to be (i.e., Croats). Ultimately, it appeared that both approaches to the killing led towards the same objective: exacting blood vengeance on the entire local Croat community for the killings the Ustašas had carried out during the previous weeks.

Unlike the Ustašas, who often tried to throw the bodies of their victims into pits or to bury them in mass graves so as to hide the evidence of their killings, the Serb insurgents tended to leave the bodies of their Croat victims in plain view so that, it seems, those who later found them would be horrified by the blood vengeance that the Serb insurgents had taken. And this was exactly what happened. Archival documents from the NDH military indicate that those who found these mutilated bodies of Croats were enraged. When a regiment of Domobrani (i.e., the 'Home Guards', the official army units of the NDH) made their way into the destroyed village of Krnjeuša a few days after the insurgents had tortured and murdered all of its Croat inhabitants who did not flee, they were aghast at the sights of mutilated and burned bodies. 'No one could remain indifferent to the horrible sight. The soldiers could barely contain themselves from going out and killing every Serb.'³⁴ But this kind of experience did not just bring about a desire to kill; it also compelled at least some to go out and murder more Serbs.³⁵ After learning that Serb insurgents had decapitated his father, Miroslav Matijević went immediately to the primary school in Kulen Vakuf, where a number of Serb prisoners were being held. With two other Ustašas he took nineteen of them to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kulen Vakuf and proceeded to butcher them inside it, as an act of revenge.³⁶ This part of the violence was symbolic, as the church was not only a place of worship but also the main repository of the community's history and identity. So the

specific methods of killing and the treatment of corpses in what was now a civil war had the result of ratcheting up the intensity of the mass violence, most especially through revenge killings that were carried out in ways intended to be both physically and symbolically destructive.

The radicalizing effects of finding bodies of victims, as well as interacting with injured survivors of massacres, swung in the other direction as well. In early August 1941 Serb insurgents overran the Croatian village of Boričevac, near the pit where the local Ustašas had murdered hundreds of Serbs from the Kulen Vakuf region. Around the entrance of the pit they found several severed heads with the eyes poked out, as well as other body parts, and pools of semi-dried blood.³⁷ Then they yelled down into the pit to see if anyone was alive. After a few moments voices called for help, and the insurgents pulled out two men who had been in the pit, in the midst of a large number of corpses, for several days and nights. One had been shot in the head, but had managed to survive, while the other had jumped in on his own after watching Matijević kill his son, two brothers, and three uncles.³⁸ Several insurgents later noted that the experience of finding these survivors and listening to their stories about how Serbs had been killed at the pit instilled in them a desire for revenge that was 'all consuming'.³⁹ At the same time, seeing the pits that the Ustašas had used may have given some insurgents an idea as to how such deep vertical caves could be used in the future, for the purpose of taking this revenge. Again, the encounter between those committing violence with the bodies of victims, as well as with survivors, had the effect of intensifying the desire to commit more violence.

The desire for revenge among many insurgents only intensified when the fighters left the area immediately around Boričevac and came across the destroyed houses of Serb peasants near the village of Kalati, which the local Ustašas had recently ransacked and burned after they had fled from Boričevac. Under the summer sun, the decomposing corpses of massacred women, children, and elderly lay inside the burned houses, and strewn throughout the yards and gardens.⁴⁰ The methods of torture and mutilation prior to killing were clear to see on the corpses: the bodies of women and girls showed signs of their having been raped prior to killing; murdered children were missing eyes, while others had been stabbed with pitchforks and leaned up against fences and walls around houses; the Ustašas had apparently impaled some victims on sticks while they were still alive, and let them suffer excruciating

deaths.⁴¹ As one insurgent later wrote: 'What we saw there was very difficult for us, and we could barely wait to find the Ustašas'.⁴² But no Ustašas remained in the immediate vicinity to take revenge on, as they had already fled to Kulen Vakuf when the insurgents attacked, taking the entire local Croat population with them. Many of the Serb fighters then laid waste to what the Ustašas left behind. They returned to the empty Croatian village of Boričevac and set every building on fire, including the Catholic Church. The whole village burned to the ground within an hour.⁴³ So once again, it was the encounter between those committing violence with the bodies of victims, as well as with survivors, that had the effect of fuelling the desire to commit more violence.

During late August 1941, in the aftermath of these massacres in the Croatian villages in the region, the local NDH authorities realized that they would not be able to hold their position in the town of Kulen Vakuf, as well as defend the local Muslim population in the vicinity, if the insurgents launched an attack. The Serb peasant fighters had amassed a considerable amount of weapons and ammunition after each of their attacks on the Croatian villages, and now had nearly 1,000 men under arms, which was many times more than their opponents in the region. They had encircled the town of Kulen Vakuf, which meant that neither supplies nor reinforcements could reach the Ustašas and NDH soldiers.⁴⁴ And so the Ustašas decided to flee while evacuating the region's entire Muslim population of about 5,600 people to the nearby city of Bihać, about 50 km away.

Early in the morning of 6 September 1941 they left. But not far from Kulen Vakuf the Serb insurgents, who were hiding in the forests, opened fire. While some fought against the armed NDH soldiers and Ustašas, others turned their rifles on the unarmed Muslim refugees, killing perhaps as many as 500. The bodies of these victims, many of whom were women and children, were left in the open along a 2 km stretch of dirt road.⁴⁵ The Ustašas and NDH soldiers returned fire and eventually managed to break through the Serb insurgent ambush after several hours of fierce fighting, bringing with them about 3,100 of the refugees.⁴⁶ The insurgents captured the remaining 2,000. One group of insurgents immediately took about seventy Muslim men to a nearby pit and, without making any attempt to determine if they had been Ustašas, shot each in the head and then dropped their bodies into the hole, killing them in exactly the same way as the Ustašas had killed Serbs earlier in the summer. The arrival of the small number of

communist commanders put a stop to these executions and they ordered that the rest of the Muslims be taken back to Kulen Vakuf.⁴⁷

Once they returned to the town, the insurgents divided the prisoners into three groups, two for women and children and one for men and teenage boys. Some of the insurgents then began breaking into shops and homes. Others opened up the many taverns in Kulen Vakuf and started drinking. Another group demanded that several of the male Muslim prisoners show them the location of the mass graves of Serb victims in Kulen Vakuf. They found a shallow grave near the primary school where the Ustašas had murdered Serbs in August 1941. The insurgents ordered several Muslims to begin unearthing the bodies. As each corpse was dragged out of the hole the insurgents tried to identify their relatives and neighbours. Other local Serbs came down from villages in the hills and joined in this process of exhuming these bodies and identifying them. This experience of touching the corpses of their murdered neighbours and relatives appears to have aroused in many what one insurgent later called 'a wild and uncontrollable desire for revenge'.⁴⁸ The encounter with these corpses seems to have marked a decisive turning point for many insurgents and peasants. With the bodies of murdered Serbs on display for all to see, the local Ustašas and the entire Muslim population seem to have merged into one entity. For many insurgents and peasants, all their Muslim neighbours now appeared guilty for the killings of their relatives and neighbours, and now all of them would need to be destroyed. What seemed to suddenly take hold among many was, in the words of one fighter who was an eyewitness, 'a psychosis of revenge'.⁴⁹ Like the killings in the previous weeks in the Croatian villages, the insurgents began with targeted killings of Muslim men suspected of having been Ustašas. They circulated among the Muslim prisoners and could be heard yelling out: 'This one is an Ustaša! He killed my brother and father',⁵⁰ and the individual would be led away and executed, sometimes with a gunshot to the head, sometimes by cutting the victim's throat, and sometimes by cutting off the victim's head.⁵¹

Not long after these targeted killings, the violence in Kulen Vakuf progressively shifted into wholesale slaughter. The insurgent commander in charge of guarding the Muslim men and boys, Petar 'Pero' Đilas, ordered that they all be taken to the nearby Serbian village called Martin Brod, where they would await some kind of improvised trial to determine their fate. Then the insurgents, along with a number of Serb peasants who had arrived to plunder the property of the Muslims, set the town of Kulen Vakuf

on fire, with many fighters drinking heavily while doing so. Soon after, they began murdering the Muslim women and children. Serb insurgents and peasants cut their throats using knives and other farm tools, or simply beat them to death with sticks. Others they chased to the edge of the Una River, and in particular to a bridge over the Una, and watched as the women threw their children and then themselves into the water, where most drowned.⁵² This meant that a large number of the bodies of these victims soon disappeared without a trace. Other Muslim women and children tried to hide in nearby cornfields, but Serb insurgents and peasants later found most of them, and it appears that there were instances of mass rape of Muslim women prior to their killing.⁵³

As for the over 400 Muslim men and boys whom the insurgents had taken to the Serbian village of Martin Brod to stand trial, the commander, Đilas, arrived at the village on a horse and yelled out to the insurgents guarding them that all of the prisoners were Ustašas and should be killed.⁵⁴ A local Serb communist, Ranko Šipka, condemned this order and demanded that the insurgents ignore it. But it appears that nearly all refused to listen to him.⁵⁵ A group of insurgents then proceeded to march the Muslim prisoners in small groups to a nearby pit, which was known to Serbs in the area as 'Golubnjača' ('the pigeon cave'). Many local Serbs believed that this pit was home to witches, vampires, and devils, and that the pigeons that were often seen around its entrance were actually angels that God had sent in order to prevent the evil spirits inside the cave from leaving and attacking people. One local Serb communist, Gojko Polovina, later told how, when he was a child, he once asked his grandfather whether such stories were true. His grandfather answered:

What kinds of devils and what kinds of witches? In Golubnjača lie the bones of rebels who were killed without trial and outside the law. They were thrown into the pit so no one would know where their graves are.⁵⁶

The Serb insurgents apparently had this understanding of the Golubnjača pit in mind when they marched the Muslim men and boys to its entrance. They bound their hands with wire and brought them in small groups to the edge of the pit. They cut the prisoners' throats and then dropped their bodies into the darkness. Only one man managed to get his hands free and escape. He ran several hundred metres into the forest and hid silently for the next hour and a half, listening to the screams of his neighbours as the insurgents murdered them one by one.⁵⁷

Before going on, it is worth pausing for a moment to sum up the overarching dynamics of mass killing and the treatment of the corpses of the victims. The Ustašas killed with gunshots to the head and they cut throats. In more ethnically mixed areas they tended to throw the bodies of their victims into pits or to bury them in mass graves, with the intention of concealing the evidence of their violence so as to not provoke resistance from the non-Serb population, many of whom opposed violence against their Serb neighbours. In other instances, the Ustašas killed and left the corpses of Serbs in plain view to decompose and be eaten by wild animals and livestock, in order to terrorize the remaining Serb population into fleeing the region. These acts of killing caused the Serb insurgency, which, initially, led to killings by Serbs of Croats, primarily by the cutting of throats. The Serb insurgents intentionally left the mutilated bodies of their Croat victims in plain view to humiliate their enemies, by showing that they had taken revenge in brutal ways, such as through decapitation and the cutting off of facial features. The discovery of these corpses and acts of mutilation further radicalized the Ustašas, who intensified their violence against the Serb community. At the same time, the experience of finding the corpses of Serb victims, as well as discovering survivors of Ustaša killings, further radicalized the Serb insurgents. This radicalization culminated in the mass killing of Muslims, whom many of the Serb insurgents, along with many local peasants, saw collectively as Ustašas. In a desire to wipe out the local Muslim population once and for all, they killed with gunshots but especially with farm tools, such as axes. They threw the vast majority of the bodies into pits and rivers, which meant that a large number of the corpses of Muslims literally disappeared. This fitted the objective of the insurgents, which was to take complete revenge on their perceived enemies, by totally erasing their presence from the community, including the presence of their corpses. In short, once the violence began, there was a causal relationship between encounters with corpses of victims and survivors of violence, and the triggering of further killings, whose scale and ferocity rapidly increased.

To return to early September 1941. In the end, of the approximately 5,600 Muslims and a handful of Croats who left Kulen Vakuf on the morning of 6 September 1941, around 3,100 arrived at the city of Bihać, along with most of the local Ustašas, whose violence had set off the successive waves of mass killing earlier in the summer. Of the other 2,500 Muslims, it appears that Serb communists, non-communist insurgents, and Serb peasants managed

to save around 500. It seems that many of those Serbs who saved their Muslim neighbours did so because of the lengths that some Muslims, as well as Croats, had gone to save Serbs earlier in the summer.⁵⁸ Serb insurgents and peasants murdered the rest – nearly 2,000 men, women and children – between 6 and 8 September 1941.

Despite the shock and disgust of local communist commanders with the massacres, no investigation was ever conducted to determine who was responsible for the killings and no one was ever punished. In September 1941, the communists could not risk alienating large numbers of insurgents at a time when they lacked sufficient authority over them.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, in the weeks that followed the massacres, communist insurgent leaders in the wider region sent out directives to local commanders in which they called attention to the need to take all possible measures to punish those who engaged in stealing, burning, and killing.⁶⁰ Such letters illustrate both the more proactive stance that the communists were taking, and the ongoing destructive behaviour of more than a small number of the fighters they sought to command. Even before the massacres in and around Kulen Vakuf, several communist leaders, such as Marko Orešković Krntija, had already issued extremely blunt statements, arguing that the killings of innocent people by the insurgents made them look no different from ‘the Ustaša hordes’.⁶¹

By 1942, the communists began to carry out more intensive political work among their predominately Serb fighters, in which they emphasized that not all Muslims and Croats were Ustašas, and that Serbs needed to cooperate with their neighbours of different nationalities in the fight for liberation.⁶² This prompted a relatively small number of insurgents to abandon their communist-led units, now increasingly called ‘the partisans’, and seek out the Chetniks, who were loosely organized groups of Serb nationalist insurgents. Notable among these were two of the insurgent commanders who were largely responsible for the massacres of the Muslims in and around Kulen Vakuf.⁶³

But the departure for the Chetniks of a handful of insurgents who were directly involved in the massacres of Muslims did not mean that partisan units in the Kulen Vakuf region were suddenly cleansed of those who had murdered Muslims. The vast majority of the Serbs who had participated in the massacres, of which there appear to have been at least several hundred, were still with the partisans. Vividly demonstrating this dynamic was what occurred

after the liberation of the city of Bihać in November 1942, when the partisans defeated the NDH military and Ustašas. Well over a year had passed since the communist leadership of the partisan movement began its intensive political work among its fighters, constantly stressing the importance of building 'Brotherhood and Unity' among Serbs, Croats, Muslims, and others in the struggle for liberation. Yet this multi-ethnic mind-set seemed still to have very shallow roots among many partisans. When one Serb fighter from the Kulen Vakuf region came upon Huso Šabić in Bihać, who was a teenager and communist sympathizer, his first question was to ask where the boy came from. Šabić replied that he was a refugee from the town of Kulen Vakuf, having fled on 6 September 1941. Upon hearing the name of the boy's hometown, the Serb partisan immediately executed him. In another instance, several partisans arrested the Muslim Halil Omanović, who was from the village of Orašac in the Kulen Vakuf region. One fighter, who was from Oraško Brdo, a Serbian village in the hills just above the Muslim village of Orašac, whose population suffered at the hands of local Muslim Ustašas, approached him. Omanović asked his former Serb neighbour why his hands had been bound. The Serb partisan looked him in the eyes and said: 'I personally killed seven members of the Omanović family [in September 1941], and now I'm going to kill you!' Several other partisans in the vicinity heard this exchange and immediately intervened to save Omanović's life.⁶⁴

So, even more than a year after the massacres of Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region, the partisan ranks still contained former insurgents who had murdered large numbers of their non-Serb neighbours, and who intended to take revenge upon them. In certain moments, such as those during the liberation of Bihać, it was clear that the local origins and dynamics of violence, and specifically the desire to take revenge, had not faded away.⁶⁵ Instead, they could be suddenly triggered, the dynamics of which researchers can better understand only through further micro-level research on the local origins and dimensions of violence. Most of the Serb perpetrators remained with the communist-led partisans at this time, and, aside from those who went over to the Chetniks or were killed in battle between 1942 and 1945, they were still with them when the war ended.⁶⁶

After the war, neither the local communist authorities nor the rest of the local population publicly discussed the September massacres

of the Muslims. The dominant type of communication about the killings was silence. People made a conscious choice not to talk about the massacres, about which they had intimate knowledge, because of a certain constellation of political, social, and psychological factors that made it virtually impossible to speak about them publicly. This led, during the initial years after the war, to the formation of a public culture of silence that crystallized in at least two distinct ways.⁶⁷

The first and most basic element was that the authorities prohibited the returning Muslim refugees from searching for and burying the bodies of their relatives and neighbours.⁶⁸ Many of the Serbs who had carried out the killings, as well as their commanding officers, who had either participated or opposed the killings, but who were nonetheless in positions of authority when the massacres took place, had, for the most part, become partisans during the war. After the war, many of these individuals occupied positions in local government. More than a few had become officers in the Yugoslav People's Army.⁶⁹ To locate and bury the bodies of the Muslims, whose deaths these individuals were directly and indirectly responsible for, would call into question their positions of authority. It would raise the issue as to whether such individuals were war criminals. Burials and reburials of the Muslim victims of the 1941 massacres were therefore prohibited.

Prohibiting the exhumation and burial of the bodies of the Muslims was made easier by the fact that the methods of killing and treatment of the corpses during the war made retrieval of the bodies very difficult. Many corpses had been washed away in the Una River. Many more were in deep pits. Even if the political will for exhumations and burials had existed, these would have been very difficult to carry out. So the absence of bodies, which made the practice of traditional death rituals nearly impossible, greatly impaired the capacity of the surviving Muslims to engage in concrete acts of remembrance, and was thus a cornerstone in the creation of a public silence about the massacres of Muslims.

A second element of the silence was that there were no post-war investigations of the killings, and therefore no trials were ever held of those responsible. This was also true of the killings of Croats in the region. Again, the basic reason for this was that the majority of Serb insurgents who participated in the massacres had become partisans during the course of the war. This dynamic resulted in the survivors having no choice but to endure regular encounters with a number of the perpetrators. Most of these encounters unfolded in

silence. Muslim men would sometimes go to the many taverns in Kulen Vakuf and see Serbs who had participated in the massacres drinking brandy or wine. They sat down at tables, ordered drinks for themselves, and drank without saying a word to those who had killed their relatives and neighbours.⁷⁰ Other Muslims worked on the railroad each day with the Serbs who had murdered their parents, yet never said a word about the killings.⁷¹ And in the weekly market Muslim women would regularly pass silently by their Serb neighbours who had tried to beat them to death in September 1941.⁷² These usually silent encounters between perpetrators and survivors were a regular part of daily post-war life. For the Muslim survivors, seeing such individuals not only walking freely, but also in a number of cases holding positions of political authority, communicated that those responsible for the massacres would not be held accountable. The absence of any war crimes investigation, and the regular encounters between unpunished perpetrators and generally silent survivors were thus central aspects in the creation of the silence.⁷³

How was it possible for such high levels of mass violence, and such brutal treatment of victims and their corpses, to result in post-war silence? First, the particular dynamics of the war, namely, the incorporation of many Serb insurgents, who had previously murdered Muslims and Croats, into the communist-led partisan movement meant that their killings would not be spoken of after 1945. The insurgents obviously did not wish to implicate themselves in the mass murder of innocent civilians. The communist authorities refused to speak of these killings out of fear of de-legitimizing their performance in the Second World War, which was a cornerstone of their 'Socialist Revolution'. So too was their desire to forge 'Brotherhood and Unity' among the country's war-torn, multi-ethnic population.

Second, the concrete methods of mass killing and the treatment of the corpses during September 1941 meant that this post-war silence was easier to enforce. Most of the bodies of Muslims in the Kulen Vakuf region had been washed away in the crystal-clear waters of the Una River and lay deep within the Golubnjača pit, as well as others. The grandfather of the local Serb communist Gojko Polovina told him long before the Second World War that bodies had been thrown into that vertical cave so that no one would know where the graves were of those 'killed without trial and outside the law'.⁷⁴ The communists found this use of the pit to be in their

political interest after 1945. The local history of the war – when communists, who fought for a multi-ethnic socialist state, joined forces during the summer and autumn of 1941 with revenge-seeking Serb insurgents, many of whom were intent on slaughtering their Croat and Muslim neighbours, whom they saw collectively as ‘Ustašas’ – was politically indigestible after 1945. The absence of the corpses of Muslims meant that fewer questions could be asked about this dark history. And this allowed the memories of those bloody months, an accurate and public record of which would have been deeply threatening the post-war communist authorities, to be pushed more easily into the shadows.

What was paramount to the communists in the first decades following the war was not confronting the complex nature of the mass violence during war. Rather, their main task was to construct a heroic master narrative about that conflict as a titanic struggle of the partisans versus foreign fascist occupiers and their domestic collaborators. The reality of the intimate mass killing among neighbours, the traumatic experience of seeing the mutilated bodies of loved ones, of pulling relatives and neighbours out of pits full of corpses, of seeing decapitated heads of parents and children on the top of sticks, and the cascading cycle of revenge killings that these experiences provoked – all this deeply divisive and potentially destabilizing history had to be tightly guarded and, for the most part, silenced after the war.

The imposition of the heroic master narrative, with its portrayal of the conflict as a macro-level conflict among rival ideological camps, has affected how scholars have studied and interpreted the mass violence in Bosnia during the war. Until very recently, the tendency was to argue for a top-down causation for the mass killing. This approach has produced many valuable studies on the macro dimensions of the mass violence.⁷⁵ Yet this dominant top-down approach has obscured the local dimensions of the violence, and in particular the history of the intimate relationship between the corpse and the escalation of mass killing, the dynamics of which come into focus only at the micro level. This chapter has tried to excavate this concealed history by taking the local dynamics of killing, the treatment of corpses, and their effects on further instances of violence as the focus of analysis. A further methodological approach here has been to disaggregate the killing in a single community so that the dynamics of the local violence can be carefully seen over time, very slowly, massacre by massacre, reaction by reaction. These modes of analysis have made it possible

to discern a local causal relationship between the methods of killing and the discovery of corpses and survivors, with the intensification of violence. Most of this violence does not appear to be very closely linked with any explicit overarching ideological agenda, such as the creation of an ethnically pure Croatian nation state, or the decisions of political elites. Rather, the initial Ustaša killings, which certainly could not have taken place without an elite committed to using mass violence to sculpt and mould the ethnic composition of the population, were nevertheless carried out by local residents who seem to have been primarily motivated by a desire to plunder their neighbours and to settle scores for past conflicts. In short, the main motivations of the foot soldiers committing the initial killings were not very similar to those of the political elites who empowered them to engage in violence. The main conclusion here, however, is that this locally executed violence then set off a complex dynamic of interconnected, cascading revenge killings, whose intensification cannot be adequately explained without taking close account of how individuals responded to the ever-growing presence in their communities of the mutilated corpses of their neighbours and relatives. This chapter argues for the need not merely to pay more attention to the dynamics of local violence, and how they often diverge from the central master cleavage of a given conflict, which is a subject that many scholars have recently called attention to.⁷⁶ Rather, we need to build on this important insight by paying more attention to a difficult-to-discern dynamic *within* the complex world of local violence: the relationship between the treatment of the corpse and the ebb and flow of revenge killings.

In the Kulen Vakuf region, the end result of the revenge-driven mass killings was the existence of a strange silence, whereby everyone knew that large numbers of Muslims and Croats had been murdered, as well as who had done the killing. Yet nearly everyone quickly learned how *not* to speak of these victims, because many of the perpetrators had become partisans during war, which made the history of the killings deeply threatening to the communist authorities after 1945. What greatly facilitated this silence was that the physical evidence of the violence – the corpses – had, for the most part, vanished. One local man succinctly summed up the atmosphere during the decades that followed the massacres simply as: ‘It was as if nothing ever happened’.⁷⁷

Notes

- 1 There was also a silence about the Croat civilian war victims in the region, which I briefly discuss here, but that is not the main subject of this chapter.
- 2 The key work here that has shaped the field in recent years is Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); for an illuminating discussion of some recent studies on local violence, which suggests a number of new questions for future research, see Evgeny Finkel, 'Mass killing and local context', *Comparative Politics*, 45:1 (October 2012), 107–24.
- 3 The ethnic structure of the region prior to the Second World War was approximately as follows: 5,600 Muslims, 8,600 Serb Orthodox, and 1,600 Croat Catholic. On these numbers, see Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Kulen Vakuf* (Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija, 1935).
- 4 For examples of this violence, much of which local Muslims, under the command of land-holding elites (*begovi*), committed against Orthodox Serb peasants in the villages near Kulen Vakuf, see Sir Arthur J. Evans, *Illyrian Letters: A Revised Selection of Correspondence from the Illyrian Provinces of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia, Addressed to the 'Manchester Guardian' During the Year 1877* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007 [1878]), pp. 39, 77–81, 85, 90–1; for examples of violence that Serb Orthodox rebels committed against local Muslims, see Esad Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa i okoline kroz istoriju* (unpublished manuscript, Sarajevo, 1980), pp. 92–5.
- 5 For a discussion of local politics in the region during the inter-war period, see Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, pp. 112–70.
- 6 On cordial relations between Serbs and Muslims during the weekly Thursday market, see Jovica Keča, 'Ustanički dani u okolini Kulen Vakufa', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga IV* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), pp. 199–200; on the ethnically mixed soccer teams in the region, see Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, pp. 128–9.
- 7 For an introduction to the history of the Independent State of Croatia, see Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Liber, 1977). The population of the NDH was approximately 6 million. Just over half were Croat Catholics. The rest included 1.9 million Orthodox Serbs, about 500,000 Muslims, 140,000 ethnic Germans, 70,000 Hungarians, 40,000 Jews, and 150,000 'others' (e.g. Roma). On these statistics, see Tomislav Dulčić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–1942* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2005), p. 79.
- 8 On the numbers and names of local Ustašas in the region, as well as on some of their motivations for joining, see: Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond 110, Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača (DKUZ), kut. 817, Okružni sud Bihać, Pojedinačne optužnice i presude, 1946, dos. br. 817-320, Javno tužništvo za Okrug

- Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Burzić Avde, 27 May 1946; *ibid.*, dos. br. 817-376, Javno tužništvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kadić Bege, 23 September 1946; *ibid.*, dos. br. 817-403, Javno tužništvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kozlice Agana, 12 October 1946; *ibid.*, dos. br. 817-421, Javno tužništvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Kulenović Mahmuta, 26 August 1946; *ibid.*, dos. br. 817-469, Javno tužništvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Pehlivanović Ibrahima, 30 May 1946; *ibid.*, dos. br. 817-534, Javno tužništvo za Okrug Bihać, Krivični predmet protiv Sušnjar-Vukalić Mujage, 15 October 1946; *ibid.*, kut. 531, dos. broj. 5361, Zapisnik br. 14, Mjesni odbor: Vrtoče, 31 July 1946; *ibid.*, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946; *ibid.*, Zapisnik br. 20, Mjesni odbor: Rajinovići, 7 August 1946; *ibid.*, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946; *ibid.*, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Kulen Vakuf, 9 August 1946; Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (ABiH), Fond Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača (ZKUZ BiH), kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946; *ibid.*, kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946; *ibid.*, kut. 14, Srez Bihać, Zapisnik br. 21, Mjesni odbor: Veliki Stjenjani, 8 August 1946.
- 9 Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, p. 129.
 - 10 It appears that the Ustašas did not seriously begin to pursue a policy of religious conversion until the autumn of 1941, once their more violent policies towards the Serb community had provoked a Serb insurgency that threatened the existence of the NDH. On the Ustaša policy of forced religious conversions, see Mark Biondich, 'Religion and nation in wartime Croatia: reflections on the Ustaša policy of forced religious conversions, 1941-1942', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 83:1 (January 2005), 71-116.
 - 11 On the wider context that framed Ustaša decision making towards the Serb community in the NDH during the early summer of 1941, see Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 395.
 - 12 'Izveštaj Zapovjedništva bosanskog diviziskog područja od 10. srpnja o pripremama naroda za ustanak i raseljavanju srpskog stanovništva u Bosanskoj Krajini', Br. 235, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom IV, knjiga 1, Borbe u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941. god.* (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institut Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), pp. 523-4; on state-wide orders to set up offices for the resettlement of certain populations of the NDH, see 'Okružnica Državnog ravnateljstva za ponovu od 2. srpnja 1941. svim Kotarskim predstojništvima o osnivanju ureda za iseljavanje, njegovoj organizaciji i zadacima', Br. 93, in *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u Prvom i Drugom svetskom ratu. Zbornik dokumenata* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1993), pp. 183-8.
 - 13 Milan Vukmanović, *Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća u ljeto 1941. godine* (Banja Luka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1987).

- 14 For examples of inter-communal rescue during the summer of 1941, see Esad Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf: Svjedočanstvo jednog vremena* (unpublished manuscript, Sarajevo, 2008), pp. 48–50; Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, pp. 120–4; Esad Bibanović, 'Kulenvakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku', in *Bihać u novijoj istoriji (1918–1945) Tom I* (Banja Luka: Institut za istoriju u Banjaluci, 1987), pp. 432–4; Abas Mušeta, *Kulen Vakuf. Tragedija od 10.04 do 06-18.09 1941: godina* (unpublished manuscript, 2004), p. 36.
- 15 Milan Obradović, 'Zločini na kotaru Donji Lapac od 1941. do 1945', in *Kotar Donji Lapac u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941–1945* (Karlovac: Historijski arhiv u Karlovcu, 1985), p. 833.
- 16 Ibid., p. 836.
- 17 'Desetodnevni izvještaj Stožer vrbaskog divizijskog područja od 8. srpnja 1941. o stanju na svojoj teritoriji i zločinima ustaša u selima Lički Osredci i Suvaja', Br. 103, in *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u Prvom i Drugom svetskom ratu. Zbornik dokumenata*, p. 217.
- 18 'Izveštaj Zapovjedništva prve hrvatske okružičke pukovnije od 16. kolovoza 1941. o zločinima ustaša i akcijama partizana u Kordunu', Br. 132, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.* (Beograd: Vojno-istoriski institut Jugoslovenske Armije, 1951), p. 343.
- 19 Rade Dubajić Čkaljac, 'Tragično djetinjstvo', in *Kotar Donji Lapac u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941–1945*, pp. 862–3.
- 20 Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA), Fond 1450, Ministarstvo oružanih snaga Nezavisne Države Hrvatske (MINORS NDH), D-2229, 'Izveštaj o vanjskoj i unutarnjoj situaciji za treću deseticu', 19–29 July 1941, p. 1.
- 21 This approximate figure was arrived at by consulting the documents in note 8.
- 22 These villages and towns included: Oštrej, Drvar, Rmanj Manastir (Martin Brod), and Grkovac. For an NDH report about these attacks, which included an urgent request for the deployment of reinforcements to crush the insurgency before it became any larger, see HDA, Fond 1450, MINORS NDH, D-2229, 'Vrhovno oružničko zapovjedništvo Zapovjedništvu kopnene vojske', 28 July 1941; see also *ibid.*, 'Izveštaj o vanjskoj i unutarnjoj situaciji za treću deseticu', 20–31 July 1941, pp. 6–7; *ibid.*, D-2121, 'Telefonska obavjest primljena', 27 July 1941, p. 1.
- 23 These villages included Doljani, Nebljusi, Palanka, and Drenovo Tijesno. See *ibid.*, D-2121, 'Situacija, 30. srpnja 1941. godine prije podne, Bihać u 12.05 časova', 30 July 1941, p. 1.
- 24 On the origins of the Serb insurgency in the region, see: Jovo Reljić, 'Martin Brod 1941. godine', in *Drvar, 1941–1945: Sjećanja učesnika, knjiga 2* (Drvar: Skupština opštine Drvar, 1972), pp. 393–4; Nikola Karanović, 'Sadještvo sa ličkim ustanicima', in *ibid.*, p. 410; Đoko Jovanić, *Ratna sjećanja* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1988), p. 119; Milan Majstorović, 'Kulen Vakuf opština u NOR-u', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: Knjiga III* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), p. 379; Keča, 'Ustanički dani u okolini

- Kulen Vakufa', p. 201. On the weakness of the communists throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina in asserting control over the Serb insurgents during the first year of the war, which nearly caused the failure of their resistance movement, see Rasim Hurem, *Kriza Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942. godine* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1972), pp. 33–71.
- 25 For examples of the rapid emergence of this sensibility in the aftermath of the Ustaša mass killings in the Kulen Vakuf region during the summer of 1941, see Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, pp. 54–5; Vukmanović, *Ustaški zločini na području Bihaća*, p. 130; Mara Kecman-Hodak, 'Sjećanje na Bušević, Kestenovac, Bosanske Štrpce i Kalate', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga III* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), pp. 199–200; Karanović, 'Sadještvo sa ličkim ustanicima', p. 410.
 - 26 'Izveštaj Krilnog oružničkog zapovjedništva Gospić od 12. srpnja 1941. Zapovjedniku 1. hrvatske oružničke pukovnije o klanju, ubijanju, paljenju i pljački srpskog življa u selu Bubanj', Br. 123, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u Prvom i Drugom svjetskom ratu. Zbornik dokumenata*, pp. 319–21.
 - 27 The Croatian villages included Boričevac, Brotnja, Vrtoče, and Krnjeuša. On these killings, see Dane Ivezić, 'Brotnja: ustanici istrijebili Iveziće', in Josip Pavičić (ed.), *Dossier Boričevac* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2012), pp. 343–52; Josip Jurjević, *Pogrom u Krnjeuši 9. i 10. kolovoza 1941. godine* (Zagreb: Vikarijat Banjalučke biskupije, 1999); Ana Došen, *To je bilo onda* (Zagreb: A. Došen, self-published, 2006); Ana Došen, *Krnjeuša u srcu i sjećanju* (Opatija: Matica Hrvatska Ogranak Rijaka i Tvrtka SCH, 1994); Josip Pavičić (ed.), *Dossier Boričevac* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2012); *Ođmetnička zvjerstva i pustošenja u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj u prvim mjesecima života Hrvatske Narodne Države* (Zagreb: Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova NDH, 1942), p. 38.
 - 28 Lazo Radošević, 'Vrtoče u ustanku', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: Knjiga II* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), p. 470.
 - 29 Ivezić, 'Brotnja', pp. 343–52. For what appears to be only a partial list of the victims who are said to have been killed by 'pro-Chetnik elements' responding to the killings that local Ustašas (from the same village) committed earlier in July 1941, see 'Žrtve fašističkog terora i rata s područja kotara Donji Lapac 1941–1945', in *Kotar Donji Lapac u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941–1945* (Karlovac: Historijski arhiv u Karlovcu, 1985), pp. 1126–7.
 - 30 HDA, Fond 1450, MINORS NDH, D-2232, 'Izvjješće Aleksandra Seitza Poglavniku', 20 August 1941. See also *Ođmetnička zvjerstva i pustošenja u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj u prvim mjesecima života Hrvatske Narodne Države*, pp. 38–42.
 - 31 Lični arhiv Esada Bibanovića (LAEB), Lični fond Esada Bibanovića, Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Kulen Vakuf* (Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija, 1935), p. 15.
 - 32 On the notion that killing by cutting of throats, rather than shooting, places victims on the level of animals, see John Allcock, *Explaining*

- Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); for a different interpretation, which stresses the lack of ammunition among Serb fighters as a possible reason for killing by cutting throats, see Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, pp. 356–7.
- 33 On the notion of discriminate and indiscriminate violence, see Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.
 - 34 HDA, Fond 1450, MINORS, D-2121, 'Izvjestaj o selu Krnjeuša, 14.VIII.1941. u 20.50 sati', 14 August 1941; on reactions to the killings in Krnjeuša, see also *ibid.*, 'Glavni stožer, Stanje 14. kolovoza', 14–15 August 1941, p. 1.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, D-2121, 'Glavni stožer, Stanje 14. kolovoza', 14–15 August 1941, p. 1.
 - 36 Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, p. 65; Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, p. 210.
 - 37 Nikola Plečaš-Nitonja, *Požar u Krajini* (Chicago: Plečaš-Nitonja, self-published, 1975), pp. 78–9.
 - 38 Pero Pilipović, 'Borba Cvjetničana na petrovačkom području', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga I* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), p. 589.
 - 39 Milan Štikavav, 'Krvavo lapačko ljeto', in *Ratna sjećanja iz NOB, knjiga II* (Beograd: Vojno-izdavački zavod, 1981), p. 616.
 - 40 Milan Majstorović & Mićo Medić, *Prve iskre: Doljani u NOB* (Zagreb: Lykos, 1961), p. 41.
 - 41 Danilo Damjanović-Danić, *Ustanak naroda Hrvatske 1941. u Srbu i okolini* (Zagreb: IP Progres, 1972), pp. 121–2; Sava Mileusnić, 'Donji Lapac u ustanku', in *Lika u NOB: Zbornik. Pišu učesnici* (Novi Sad: Budućnost, 1963), p. 390.
 - 42 Majstorović & Medić, *Prve iskre*, p. 41.
 - 43 Nikola Knežević, 'Cvjetničani u akciji', in *Drvar, 1941–1945. Sjećanja učesnika, knjiga 2* (Drvar: Skupština opština Drvar, 1972), p. 457.
 - 44 On how the local Serb insurgents better armed themselves after each of their attacks during July and August 1941, see Pilipović, 'Borba Cvjetničana na petrovačkom području', p. 593.
 - 45 On these killings, see 'Izvjestaj Štaba partizanskih odreda u Brdu Oraškom drvarske brigade od 9. septembra 1941. god. o borbama za oslobođenje Kulen Vakufa', 9 September 1941, Br. 114, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom IV, knjiga 1, Borbe u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941. god.*, pp. 253–4; 'Komanda 3. Žandarmerijske pukovnije Banja Luka Vrhovnoj komandi Žandarmerije NDH Zagreb', 12 September 1941, in Vladimir Dedijer & Antun Miletić (eds), *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941–1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990), p. 66.
 - 46 Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, pp. 95–6.
 - 47 For the testimony of Bećo Šiljdedić, a man who survived these executions, see *ibid.*, pp. 97–9.
 - 48 Karanović, 'Sadještvo sa ličkim ustanicima', p. 413. On the exhumation of these bodies, and the reactions to them, see Dušan Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini* (Beograd: Vojno-izdavački zavod, 1967), pp. 191–2;

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- 49 Radošević, 'Vrtoče u ustanku', p. 472.
- 50 Jovanić, *Ratna sjećanja*, p. 128.
- 51 On this phase of the killings, see Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, pp. 100–1; see also ABiH, Fond ZKUŽ BiH, kut. 88, Svjedočenje Altića Aijše i Kadića Zejne, undated and handwritten document, most likely from the summer of 1946.
- 52 For the recollections of a woman who jumped into the water with her three children, of whom two quickly drowned, see the testimony of Hana Štrkljević in Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, p. 101; see also, AJ, Fond 110, DKUŽ, kut. 531, dos. br. 5361, Zapisnik br. 10, Mjesni odbor: Kalati, 5 August 1946, p. 7.
- 53 Derviš Kurtagić, *Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu* (Bihać: Derviš Kurtagić, self-published, 2005), p. 32; Mušeta, *Kulen Vakuf*, p. 48. It appears that there were instances in which insurgents took Muslim girls, particularly those from the families of former Muslim land-holders, and kept them prisoner for days while passing them around from insurgent to insurgent to be raped. On this subject, see Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, p. 290.
- 54 Bibanović, 'Kulenvakufski komunisti', p. 452; see also the testimony of Mujo Dervišević, who was among the prisoners when this order was given, in Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, p. 287.
- 55 Bibanović, *Kulen Vakuf*, p. 105.
- 56 Gojko Polovina, *Svjedočenje. Prva godina ustanka u Lici* (Beograd: Izdavačka radna organizacija Rad, 1988), pp. 91–2.
- 57 For the testimony of the sole survivor, Mujo Dervišević, see Ibrahim Kajan, 'Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača', *Ogledalo*, 1:2 (December 1990), p. 27.
- 58 On instances of inter-communal rescue during the massacres of Muslims between 6 and 8 September 1941, see Abaz Mušeta, 'Tužan gledam kako moj Vakuf tiho gori i umire, više ne mogu ni plakati', in J. Pavičić, (ed.), *Dossier Boričevac* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2012), p. 404; Ilija Rašeta, *Kazivanje pobjednika smrti* (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1988), pp. 173–80.
- 59 For communist reactions to the massacres of Muslims in and around Kulen Vakuf, see 'Izveštaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji', Br. 42, undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.*, p. 134; 'Izveštaj Štaba partizanskih odreda u Brdu Oraškom drvarske brigade od 9. septembra 1941. god. o borbama za oslobođenje Kulen Vakufa', 9 September 1941, Br. 114, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom IV, knjiga 1, Borbe u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941. god.*, pp. 253–4; 'Naređenje

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- 60 See, for example, HDA, Fond 1194, Zbirka dokumenata NOR i Partizanskih odreda Jugoslavije, kut. 22, 'Štab gerilskih odreda za Srez Korenicu i okolinu Operativnim oficirima na položaju', 23 September 1941.
- 61 Ibid., Marko Orešković Krntija, 'Uloga i zadaci partizanskih odreda', undated document but appears to have been written at the end of August 1941, p. 7.
- 62 On this political work by the communists, see Hurem, *Kriza Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p. 95; Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj Krajini*, p. 307.
- 63 These two were Mane Rokvić and Petar 'Pero' Đilas. On Rokvić, see ABiH, Fond ZKUŽ BiH, kut. 91, Zapisnik br. 22, Mjesni odbor: Malo Očijevo, 9 August 1946, p. 2; *ibid.*, kut. 68, Srez Bosanski Petrovac, Zapisnik br. 18, Mjesni odbor: Prkosi, 4 August 1946, p. 3. On Đilas, see Reljić, 'Martin Brod 1941', pp. 404–5; Polovina, *Svedočenje*, pp. 92–3; Pero Pilipović, 'Istina o jednom zločinu', in *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB. Zbornik sjećanja. Knjiga II* (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), p. 605; 'Izveštaj Štaba gerilskih odreda za Liku koncem rujna 1941. god. Štabu drvarske brigade o vojno-političkoj situaciji', undated but appears to have been written on or about 15 September 1941, Br. 42, in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom V, knjiga 1, Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941. god.*, p. 134. On the history of the Chetniks in the region more generally during the Second World War, see Simo Lukić, 'Četnici u kotaru Donji Lapac od 1941. do 1945', in *Kotar Donji Lapac u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941–1945* (Karlovac: Historijski arhiv u Karlovcu, 1985), pp. 865–8.
- 64 Bibanović, *Stanovništvo Kulen Vakufa*, pp. 331–2.
- 65 For another example of the settling of scores that went on during the partisan takeover of Bihać in 1942, when some local Serbs from the Kulen Vakuf region sought out former Muslim neighbours whom they believed had been Ustašas, see Kurtagić, *Zapisi o Kulen Vakufu*, p. 37.
- 66 For examples of Serbs who were absorbed into the partisans after having participated in the massacres of Muslims, see *ibid.*, p. 32; see also the testimony of Mujo Dervišević in Kajan, 'Pakao Vakuf Golubnjača', p. 27.
- 67 On the notion of silence as a form of communication, and how it often becomes dominant in the aftermath of traumatic events when no social and political framework exists to support alternative modes of expression, see Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), p. 96.
- 68 Interviews with: Derviš Kurtagić, 9 November 2006, in Kulen Vakuf; Sead Kadić, 3 November 2008, in Bihać; Derviš Dervišević, 1 and 5 October 2008, in Klisa; Maho Vazović, 24 September 2008, in Kulen Vakuf; Ale Galijašević, 12 October 2008, in Kulen Vakuf.

- 69 Two such individuals were Jovo Reljić and Nikola Karanović, both of whom were said to have made attempts to save Muslims during the killings in and around Kulen Vakuf. For basic biographical information on Reljić, see Arhiv Unsko-sanskog Kantona (AUSK), Fond Sreski komitet (SK) Saveza komunista (SK) Bosne i Hercegovine (BiH), Bihać, kut. 172, biografski podaci, Jovo Reljić, 14 February 1959, p. 2; on his apparent attempts to oppose the killings of Muslims, see Damjanović-Danić, *Ustanak naroda Hrvatske 1941. u Srbu i okolini*, pp. 195–7; for basic information on Karanović, see 'Likovi boraca iz revolucije: Nikola Karanović', *Krajina: list Saveza socijalističkog radnog naroda bihačkog sreza*, 1 June 1961, p. 5.
- 70 Interview with Adem Dervišević, 6 October 2008, in Klisa. The drinking of alcohol was not uncommon among some Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly those who were not religiously observant.
- 71 Interview with Sead Kadić, 3 November 2008, in Bihać.
- 72 Interview with anonymous informant, 24 September 2008 (location withheld).
- 73 For a more extensive analysis of the post-war silence in the Kulen Vakuf region about Muslim civilians massacred by Serb insurgents in 1941, see Max Bergholz, 'The strange silence: explaining the absence of monuments for Muslim civilians killed in Bosnia during the Second World War', *East European Politics and Societies*, 24:3 (summer 2010), 408–34.
- 74 Polovina, *Svedočenje*, pp. 91–2.
- 75 See, for example, Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941–1945*; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*; see also Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, which is a newer study that purports to study local mass killing in Bosnia during 1941–42, but nonetheless ends up portraying the violence in various regions as essentially the result of the decisions of nationalist political elites. The locality is portrayed here as impacted from the outside, rather than a place whose own dynamics of history and violence, even if shaped in significant ways by outsiders, are worthy of being the central analytical focus.
- 76 See Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.
- 77 Interview with Adem Dervišević, 6 October 2008, in Klisa.

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