

Article

Life History Research and the Violence of War: Experiencing Binary Thinking on Pain and Privilege, Being and Knowing

Maja Korac ^{1,*} and Cindy Horst ² 

¹ Institute for Sociological Research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

² Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 0186 Oslo, Norway; cindy@prio.org

* Correspondence: maja.korac57@gmail.com

Abstract: This reflective piece explores the ‘I am the evidence’ side of the process of knowing. It offers the story of the Yugoslav wars of secession (1991–1999) and their human consequences from the point of view of someone who refuses to surrender ground to the socio-political conditions of life in which ethno-national and cultural differences have to be transgressed. The core of this article is based on the life history of Maja Korac, developed in conversation with Cindy Horst. It approaches the intersections of her life and research from a narrative research perspective. We engage in a *contrapuntal* discussion of how Maja’s family background, gender, social class, and ethnic/national identity affected her life choices in terms of political engagement, research trajectories, and mobility paths. In doing so, we follow Barad’s argument that we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are part of the world. Hence, our discussion and analysis enables the multivocal articulation of the interweaving of personal, collective, geopolitical, and historical contexts in Maja’s research. This process made Maja feel *visible* after a very long time, because it opened the possibility of (re)gaining the vocabulary to express *who* she is, and how it has been for her as a human being within a professional role and identity, as well as within an ascribed ethnic identity during a specific historic time. This opportunity for understanding and knowing while being *inside* the world allowed Maja to repossess her life and identity—individual, professional, collective. It also re-opened the possibility to challenge further the notion of ‘true knowledge’ that is presumably based on ‘methodologically sound paradigms’, all of which exclude the researcher as a person, as *who*, as a life.



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1. Introduction: Life History Research and Polyphony of Voices

This reflective piece, based on a life history and narrative method approach, was a very long time coming, and also quite long in the making. The process of Maja’s inner search for meaning, of making sense of various academic and non-academic settings she has been part of, as well as the labelling processes they impose, was long, mostly exhausting, at times exhilarating or infuriating, and often painful. Seemingly paradoxically, being a social scientist and a scholar was not a straightforward way to untangle the related knots—methodological, epistemic, institutional, social, political, and cultural—inherent in the sensemaking endeavours linked to these processes, many of which have also become ‘issues in tissues’, hence, bodily. Being a feminist scholar was certainly central to this long and convoluted process of discovery, recognition, acknowledgement, and self-acceptance. Working together on a life history approach was, as well. In what follows, we engage a polyphony of voices—of Maja Korac and Cindy Horst. As the interlocutor, the careful listener as well as the curious reader of Maja’s published work, Cindy offers a valuable interpretation of the life narrative and provides key insights about Maja’s experience, as

well as her written published work. As the narrator, as one of the authors of this reflective piece, as well as the author of the publications that are an integral part of these explorations, Maja takes an active exploratory and explanatory role in this process of 'align[ing] with the real' (Kolozova 2014, p. 4). In this sense, this piece offers what Gomez-Peña (1995 cited in Seyhan 2001; Kindle edition location 1589) refers to as 'the epistemology of multiplicity'. This conceptual approach, hence, enables the multivocal articulation of the interweaving of personal, collective, geopolitical, and historical contexts with Maja's research. In doing so, it provides the opportunity for understanding and knowing while being inside the world. Maja's voice speaks in the remainder of this introduction and in the conclusion, while Cindy's voice presents the life story which was created based on a series of conversations, developed into a life story by Cindy and then rewritten by Maja through a collaborative process of back-and-forth written and oral communication.

Being and Knowing

A more structured endeavor to focus on the intersections of my life and my research linked to the secession wars in Yugoslavia, the country I come from, dates back to May 2020, when Cindy approached me for a series of life story interviews, for her book project (Horst 2023). At the time, I was a reader in refugee and migration studies at the University of East London, and had nearly 40 years of academic experience from Yugoslavia, Canada, and the UK. Cindy and I did not know each other well, although we had met at conferences a few times and knew something of each other's work since we are in the same academic field. Hence, this invitation was surprising and unexpected.

From then on, over the course of several months, we engaged in three long online interview sessions, as well as the re-reading of transcripts, several post-interview content clarifying online meetings, and final editing exchanges. At the publishing stage, however, in October 2022, we mutually agreed to turn my life story into a standalone, co-authored narrative piece based on my life history. Hence, this article. This also prompted me to take on a principal role in articulating the overarching conceptual approach and its overall final discussion. Cindy's input remained central in structuring and discussing the interviews, as well as in reading, interpreting, and selecting relevant content and quotes from my published work.¹

Initially, I was excited about the opportunity to share my life-story and publications with Cindy, because I thought, at the time, that it would help me to write auto-ethnography, the project that I had been contemplating for quite a while. A couple of months later, however, in July of the same year, when I decided abruptly and unexpectedly to retire early, the exchanges with Cindy and reflections on my life and research acquired a new perspective. In addition to the drive to reflect upon the methodological aspects of researching one's own places and processes of pain, with my scholarly hat on, the retirement brought about a sense of newly acquired freedom in how to narrate the *self* and articulate experience. This change in my professional status enabled me to appreciate fully the meaning of Cavarero's ([1997] 2000) ideas about the centrality of *Who* I am, as an embodied life, not only of *What* I am, as a social science and/or a feminist scholar, for the process of understanding and knowing. This newly acquired side of the prism through which our exchanges have started to crisscross within me provided very important, additional meaning to the processes of being and knowing (Barad 2007). Barad's (ibid.) argument that the 'practices of knowing and being are not insoluble; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are part of the world' (p. 185) is, indeed, central to the 'I am the evidence' approach to knowing. Equally, Abu-Lughod's (1996) stress on the particularity of experience and the importance of centering on 'actual circumstances and detailed histories of individuals' and 'their changing relationships' that are enabled through the 'textual means of representation' (ibid., p. 476) is conceptually crucial for focusing on the life history and narrative methods and approach in this reflective piece. In doing so, it challenges the practice of generalization and typicality of knowledge, which is still prevalent in many social science fields.

This shift did not come abruptly, though, although it was triggered by my retirement. It was there for quite some time. It was evident in my growing dissatisfaction with the still prevailing, seemingly disengaged way of knowing and relating our socio-political realities within academia. Around that time, I wrote and published *The Key Stories* (Korac-Sanderson 2016), a piece in which I engaged with my own experiences of bordering processes and othering practices I encountered ever since my life was reshaped by war. Writing that set of stories has been the single most profound experience of my life, way beyond the experience of writing anything I had written in my nearly 40-year-long academic social scientist career.

A spinoff of this process of articulating and narrating the *self* that has been an integral but estranged part of my professional academic role and identity, brought about a few additional ‘stories’ that I was able to articulate and write at around the same time. Three of these stories found home in the present account of my life–research–teaching trajectory and are central to the process of triggering an ability to ‘align with the real’ (Kolozova 2014, p. 4). This entire reflective endeavor, based on my life history and narrative linked to it, is an attempt to ‘ground abstractions’ (Tamboukou 2020) and align with the real, although *the real* is a continuous process of becoming, as Laruelle reminds us (Laruelle [1996] 2013). This process leaves tracks and traces in bodies and stories, told or written (Tamboukou 2021). I share here one such story, entitled *Evidence*, which I wrote in 2016. It documents and articulates the problems and pains of these processes.

Evidence

This has been a trying time. In so many ways also the best time of my life. Because for the first time in my quite a long life, I know what knowing means. I can experience it. I feel it. It runs throughout my body and mind. Notice ‘the order of things’ I use! Realising this, experiencing it, has been the single, most important thing in my life, so far. The one on which all else can be built. In a meaningful way.

Except that it also left me deeply troubled about one aspect of my life. A very important one, at that. My profession. I am a social scientist, and a scholar. My profession requires me to take an active part in the process of the production of knowledge through a creative link between research, teaching, and public engagement. Some like to call this last bit—‘impact’. It is also known as—evidence-based research in social sciences. In what I do, I’ve been grappling with the idea for quite some time now. How do I evidence the evidence that may not be seen as evidence by others?

This is what happened to me at one of these mega-big international, evidence based, EU funded, mega project conferences on migration. A fellow Canadian was one of the plenary speakers. His talk is on Canadian multiculturalism and he is critical about it. I listen. I follow the categories presented on slides. The statistical data, too. His talk is based on a big pan-Canadian survey of immigrants. Impressive. How many people had to work very hard to develop and carry out that kind of research, I think to myself? How much statistical and other knowledge was required to come up with all these categories? The cost of it all must’ve been equally impressive. I mean, if you compare it to what I need to travel to a place and ‘talk to a few people and mingle’, as some funders as well as some colleagues view what I do. Or I even do not have to travel. I can stay put, and still do it.

The categories were impressive, as I said, the number of them, the way they were neatly presented on the graphs. All very scientific. But I was unable to find myself in there. My experience, as an immigrant in Canada, as a naturalised Canadian who now lives and works abroad, was not in these categories. I was not on the graphs! And I am sure that I was not the only one missing. Even if I am to be reduced to a statistical error, I want my voice to be counted in. I, my experience, make the knowledge—whole. Without me or you, it is incomplete.

During the break, I approach the fellow Canadian speaker, I introduce myself. I tell him briefly that my experience with and of Canadian multiculturalism was somewhat different

from what was presented. I talk. He listens and he asks: But where is evidence for what you are saying? I smile and say: I am the evidence. This closes our scientific exchange.

In the following sections, we present my life history and offer a relational and critical account of some of my published work by pointing to intersections between my life and my research. In the subsequent pages, Cindy and I engage in a contrapuntal discussion of how my family background, gender, social class, and ethnic/national identity affected my life choices in terms of political engagement, research trajectories, and mobility paths. One of the central aspects of this life history narrative endeavor is to point to the genesis of the multi-cultural aspect of my identity. Given that this aspect of my identity, which I see as central to my way of being, ceased to be socio-politically acceptable and recognized due to the Yugoslav wars of secession, as well as the interventionist, liberal peace initiatives in the region, Cindy and I engage with the consequences—personal, professional, political, epistemic—of these socio-political processes. A second important intersecting relation between my life and research, emerging from the following contrapuntal discussion and narrative, is the importance of feminist scholarship and activism, based on my gender-relational, anti-nationalist, and anti-war analysis and approaches. The following pages reveal how and why they have been equally vital for my personal preservation, scholarly work, as well as political engagement. Finally, my mobility paths and experiences are an important element of the following life history narrative, in which my migratory decisions and movements are juxtaposed with my experience of performing research with people who fled the Yugoslav wars of secession, or those I met while living, studying, and working abroad. Here, we engage with the processes of doing research in and creating knowledge about places of pain and human suffering, as well as with the notions of privilege and othering linked to different types of migratory processes and ways of being.² In engaging with these three lines of narration linked to my personal life experience, we open up the space to co-articulate an embodied, experientially grounded, non-binary understanding of conflict and war-related victimization. In doing so, we question the usefulness of generalizations and typification (Abu-Lughod 1996), as well as the separation between being and knowing (Barad 2007) in making knowledge claims about conflict-related experiences of pain, loss, and trauma.

2. Family Stories from the Past: Flexible National Identification, Social Justice, and Emancipatory Family Traits

2.1. Otherness Was Just Part of Life

Maja opens her life story with one about her grandparents and parents' siblings, through which she communicates two characteristics that, to her, define her family. First, her family always treated people as fellow human beings, within a historic and geopolitical setting in which it was almost expected to treat 'the other' as, if not the enemy, then at least as fundamentally different. For her family, as Maja phrases it, 'Otherness was just part of life, it was not something that needed to be transgressed'. Second, both of her parents' families, from her position of relative privilege, believed strongly in social justice. Hence, the family members practiced generosity and spoke their minds on contentious topics.

Her stories about different ancestors repeatedly stress the level of openness and inclusion her family practiced. For example, Maja tells me about her maternal grandmother, who was born around the turn of the 20th century in the Serbian province of Vojvodina; at the time it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The region was populated with Germans, Hungarians, and Serbs; there was also a sizable Jewish population. Her maternal grandmother's father sent each of his three children to a German, Hungarian, and Hebrew school, so that, collectively, they would be familiar with and comfortable within the cultural diversity of their surroundings. Maja's great-grandfather made sure that the children learned the Serbian language and culture at home.

The openness of her family also comes across clearly in the story of Elsa that Maja shares. During the Second World War, one of her father's brothers was conscripted into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's army to fight the Germans. Yugoslavia capitulated almost

immediately and Maja's uncle was captured and taken to a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp near Neustrelitz, in Germany, where he remained throughout the war. As a POW, he was initially sent to work in a theatre, where he met and fell in love with Elsa, a German actress who secretly assisted the POWs. In 1943, the Gestapo tracked Elsa and she had to leave town. Meanwhile, Maja's uncle was assigned to work in a dental practice, as he was a dental technician by training. That is where he contracted tuberculosis. At the war's end, after a harrowing journey that took months, his condition was so bad that he died soon after his return home, in 1945.

In 1946, a letter arrived at Maja's father's family home. Delivered by the Red Cross, it had been in transit for several months. The letter was from Elsa. The family learned that Elsa had been pregnant when she disappeared three years earlier. She did not say whether Maja's uncle had ever known. The baby had died. Maja's father, at his mother's urging, wrote to Elsa, telling her of the death of her sweetheart and expressing the family's sympathy for the loss of the child. The family invited her to visit, saying that she would always be welcome. Maja tells me:

One needs to remember that this was in 1946, in Yugoslavia, where Germans faced deep hatred, like elsewhere across Europe. I am mentioning this because it was very remarkable. Many people at the time would have said that she was the enemy. They would have been ashamed, engaged in self-censorship, and they would make sure no neighbour hears. But my grandmother had a remarkably openminded attitude at the time; she wanted my father to get in touch with Elsa because, as she told him, she was with her son when he needed support the most.

What was equally remarkable was that Elsa took them up on the invitation and visited the family in 1951, after the exchange of several letters, and a life-long family friendship developed. Maja tells me the following:

The family story about Elsa helps explain, among other things, why I was always looking at people as individuals, not as labels. The first German I ever knew was Elsa. Only later did I learn about Germans who were Nazis... The point I am making here is that I have lived and experienced openness towards others since I was a child.

By relating these episodes from her family's long-ago past, Maja is telling me just how deep-rooted her openness to difference is. Other stories that she shares drive home the point that this openness also involved taking purposeful socio-political stances in order to fight for social justice.

2.2. *Social Justice: Acting and Speaking Up*

Maja's paternal grandfather, a well-to-do merchant and a benefactor in the region in the interwar period, was a politically active socio-democrat. She grew up knowing that her grandfather had been assassinated during the 1938 local elections in his hometown because of his political beliefs. Maja also explains other, interrelated, aspects of her parental family heritage that have been an integral part of her upbringing:

I also grew up knowing that my parental grandfather made his will in 1938, just six months before he was assassinated. He left everything to his wife, my grandmother, including his trading business/company to lead/manage with one of their three sons, the one she would feel the most comfortable to collaborate and work with, the will states. At the time when my grandfather wrote this will, his two elder sons were 26 and 22 years old (my father was 14 years old at the time), and his eldest son was already working with him in his trading company. He had also stipulated that it is up to his wife to decide how she would want to divide up his estate among their sons. The only property left explicitly to his sons or one of them, were his books, that is—his quite large library, under the condition that they or one of them would be pursuing intellectual career/path.

Otherwise, it was to be left to the local, town's library with a clear indication that the books came from his library.

In the context of the then Yugoslavia, which was exceptionally traditional and patriarchal, my grandfather's relationship with and respect for his wife, my grandmother, was quite exceptional. Growing up, I was never told that treating women/wives as partners at the time was extraordinary. I grew up knowing that that is how it has always been in my family. It was only later, when I encountered feminism and its scholarship that I realised how unique my parental grandfather's attitude was. Indeed, it was progressive and emancipatory not only for his time and that society, but far beyond that specific socio-historic context.

Maja continues the story of her parental grandfather's social and political views and their lasting influence, saying 'That influenced my father, and also informs me today'. She offers a story to explain how her father balanced speaking up with holding a relatively privileged social position in socialist Yugoslavia.

In 1949, my parents were just married. This was also less than a year after the breakup with Soviet Russia, when Yugoslavia officially embarked on its unique socialist path, to become a socialist country 'with a difference', as Meg Coulson (1993) characterized it.³ In 1949, however, the process was just starting and it was extremely, extremely difficult, both economically and politically. Although there was this formal separation from the Cominform politics, led by Stalinist Soviet state, much of it was still 'the Soviet/Stalinist way'. For example, in how the everyday party life was conducted.

At the time, many young people were members of the communist party, including both my parents. That was the time when, if you were a party member, you would need to ask for permission from the party cell you were part of, if you were to travel somewhere, anywhere. In one such meeting, my father stood up and said: 'My wife and I are going to visit my mother next week because it's St. Nicholas, my family patron saint and an important day to my mother'. And no one said a word. That is how my father went to visit his mother on his family patron saint, with the blessing from the party, in 1949! That was quite unimaginable at the time.

I ask her to explain to me why this was so unimaginable.

In 1949, religion was completely forbidden grounds, although that changed to certain extent later. I'm absolutely certain that there were many people at that time and later on who through some sort of self-censorship did not dare say that they were marking a religious day. But that did not stop my father.

Even when he couldn't do anything to stop political practices he deeply disagreed with, he was finding ways to speak up. For example, while he was in Cambridge, on a Yugoslav Government scholarship, in 1953–1954, he was aware that, at the time, all letters sent from abroad, and possibly not only from abroad, were intercepted and read first, before being delivered to their rightful recipients. Hence, when he was writing to my mother or his mother, he always added a paragraph, addressing the so-called UDBA (i.e., federal state security services) readers. As he used to say: 'so that they are not bored by all that emotional and family stuff in my letters'.

In retrospect, I would say that he was refusing to be intimidated by what he saw as unacceptable political practice. And again, in retrospect, I think that his refusal to be intimidated is not primarily, or possibly at all, linked to so-called fearlessness or bravery. It stems from a very strong belief, in your mind and heart, that what you stand for is the only thing you can do.

To me, Maja conveys how her parents at that time both operated within the political system rather than in opposition to it, while remaining critical of it and refused to engage in

the self-censorship that was expected. When I ask Maja if her father faced any consequences for his outspoken behavior, she responds:

He did not lose his position, he was promoted as an academic and, indeed, he was not imprisoned. The latter was not the way of dealing with political opponents in the country from the 1960, I'd say. My father was engaged in bitter public, political debates most of his life. He was quite often publicly attacked in the media [...] He used to carry it quite well throughout his life. So, that was the price he had to pay for speaking up and pushing boundaries that he felt needed to be pushed.

This does not mean that there weren't people who were actually crashed in different ways, but that never happened to anyone in my close environment. I guess that is why I speak my mind. And that of course, is not socially wise anywhere and at any time, not just during the time of socialist Yugoslavia.

By making direct links between her understanding of her family's past and the way she approaches life, Maja is telling me how deeply embedded her openness to diversity, her strong sense of justice, and her need to speak up is.

3. Life in Yugoslavia before the Yugoslav Wars: Yugoslav Identity as Shared Identity and the Importance of Feminist Engagements

Maja talks about her childhood largely through the theme of open-mindedness and focuses on the extensive traveling with her family in the 1960s and 1970s. These stories help to explain her identification as Yugoslav rather than Serb. She also talks about her young adult years in the late 1970s and 1980s in Yugoslavia, during which period she developed an increasing interest in feminism and feminist scholarship.

3.1. Growing Up and Forging Shared Identity: Memories of Travel

Maja was born in 1957 in Belgrade, in what was then the capital of Yugoslavia and is now the capital of Serbia. She lived, was educated, and worked there until 1992, when, at age 35, she went on a one-year scholarship to Britain. Both Maja's mother and father were economists by training. They met as students, at university. Her mother was the Managing Director of the Yugoslav Economists Association for nearly three decades. Her father was an economics professor at the University of Belgrade. Maja talks about her childhood years mostly in terms of the traveling she did with her family.

Maja's father travelled extensively during his academic career, often taking his family with him. Before Maja was born, he spent the 1953–1954 academic year in Cambridge on a scholarship from the Yugoslav government, while working on his doctorate, and her mother joined him during his second term there. When Maja was four years old, her father got a Ford Foundation scholarship to the United States, for the 1961–1962 academic year; Maja, her sister, and mother joined him and stayed in New York City, Washington DC, Chicago, and several other places. Maja went to kindergarten for a period in Berkeley, California.

It was the height of the Cold War when we were in the States, and as people from a so-called 'communist' country we were the family to be seen, met, and touched, if possible [laughs] [...] Everybody was keen to meet us, and my parents were subjected to all kinds of questions about freedoms, rights and liberties under the so-called 'communist regime'. In a country in which, at the time, a huge percentage of its own population had no rights and freedoms because of the colour of their skin.⁴

Her father also took the family to his month-long visiting professorship engagement at the University of Poznan, in Poland, in 1964. In addition to these work-related family travels, Maja's family travelled a lot both in Europe and within the then-Yugoslavia.

This kind of dedicated traveling by car to visit places in Europe for around a month during summer was happening, for a period, every two years. It always

involved catching up with people, sometimes with family friends who happened to live in the places we were visiting or staying with Elsa and her husband Mutz in Baden-Baden, as well as catching up with all kinds of professional contacts that my father had. They would take us around; they would invite us to their homes. These trips were never just pure tourism, visiting museums and historic sites. They were a possibility of meeting local people, everywhere we went.

We did not only travel abroad. We travelled extensively in Yugoslavia, mostly during summers; from the early 1960s on, by car. So, by the age of 15, there was practically no part of that country that I did not know and in which I did not meet someone who is local. My father was really a meticulous planner of these trips. Also, through his work, and because he was that kind of person, he knew someone almost everywhere. Like a former student now happily working somewhere. He would let them know that we were coming. Thus, we were always greeted by someone local, shown around, met other local people they knew.⁵ [..]

I'm saying this because that is how I felt that these places—how would I say this now, without causing offense to anybody—are mine; that I know them, that I engaged with people everywhere I went. That is how all these places have become an integral part of me. They deeply formed me. I have formative links with all these places, smells, accents, languages. I am a true multi-cultural South Slav or Yugo-Slav.⁶ That's probably one of the strongest and deeply emotional reasons that I have never made peace with that horrible war.

In her thesis, as elsewhere, Maja stresses how her Yugoslav identity was created through lived experience; it was not merely ideology or political choice. She refers to a shared experience with all peoples of the region, which 'determined the "mapping of my phenomenological experience" (Rutherford 1990) onto that culturally, religiously, linguistically and geographically heterogeneous 'body" (Korac 1998a, p. 23). Her childhood experiences, Maja explains, unconsciously shaped her notion of diversity based on a sense of difference that is not 'pure otherness'. She also connects her approach to social tensions caused by rising nationalism and subsequent war to her experiences of being raised within an open-minded, travelled family, as well as her interest in feminism and feminist scholarship developed at the start of her professional life.

When faced with the violent re-composition of my social space based on the ultimate claim for ethnic-national 'oneness' and the creation of a hated other, my feminist experience—which I have defined as a choice of flexible identifications—remained crucial for who I am, and who I could become (Korac 1998a, p. 23).

3.2. *Young Adulthood: Feminist Engagements as Critique of Socialist and Nationalist Patriarchy in the Region*

From late-1970s, during her studies in sociology at the University of Belgrade, Maja became interested in feminism. In her book 'Linking arms' (Korac 1998b), Maja explains how feminism in socialist Yugoslavia was linked to a relatively small group of professional women who engaged critically with the official political claim that the state socialist system secures the emancipation of women through class struggle.⁷ They were challenging socialist patriarchy, Maja points out, from the margins of the socialist state system.

Maja's first encounter with feminism was when she was 21, during the International Feminist Conference held in Belgrade in October 1978. It was the catalyst for autonomous women's organizing in Yugoslavia that started off with consciousness-raising groups. Maja situates her initial engagement with feminism in the following way:

I was not part of the 'sisterhood is powerful' process. The notion of sisterhood had always struck me as too much of a sameness, something that I could not identify with. What appealed to me was a critique of systems of power that feminism offers in exposing the sources of injustice that need to be addressed to

achieve equality of opportunity. My 'consciousness-raising' was linked to reading and lively discussions with friends, mostly women of my generation. The process turned me into 'the curious feminist', to borrow from Cynthia [Enloe \(2004\)](#), a colleague and a dear friend.

Yugoslav feminism and feminist activism never became a movement akin to feminist movements in North America or Western Europe because, Maja explains, the rights of women were substantially different in these places, at the time. Yugoslav women won voting rights in 1945. They won the right to own property, have financial assets in their name, and a host of other important gender equality rights with the establishment of the socialist state and its constitution, in 1946. This was not the case in the so-called Western world, she continues. In France, for example, while women did win the right to vote in the same year, 1945, they gained the right to open a bank account in their own name only in the 1960s. In Switzerland, as yet another example, women gained voting rights in federal elections as late as 1971 and Swiss women in some of the cantons were granted the right to vote on local issues only in 1991. In England, she continues, aristocratic women cannot inherit the so-called 'family seat' or land even today, and if they are the only children of the late aristocrat, the property goes to a male relative, however distant. In North America, gender inequalities were also addressed much later than what she had been used to:

During my PhD in Canada, some of my colleagues who studied in the 70s, remembered 'staff common rooms' to which women did not have access. Such an experience was alien to me. But it also explains why it was paramount to have strong feminist movements in the 1960s and 70s, in the Western world.

Women in Yugoslavia gained all these rights in 1945/6; but to translate that into equality of gender power relations, it is necessary not only to change the law, but also to tackle culture and customs, both of which remained deeply patriarchal. That is what feminism in Yugoslavia was tackling.

In the late 1980s, feminists were amongst the first citizens in Yugoslavia to articulate the risks of rising ethno-nationalism. This was linked, Maja says, to their critique of nationalist patriarchy and its ideology. In order to mobilize the population for war, gender roles were re-traditionalized and patriarchy reaffirmed ([Korac 2006, 2016, 2018](#)). Local nationalist projects saw women as precious property to be controlled and protected, and as 'the precious property of the enemy whose bodies became territories to be seized and conquered' ([Korac 2006](#), p. 513).

Consequently, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, feminism became politically relevant in Yugoslavia, in a way it was not before. Maja recalls this period of intense feminist organizing and lobbying:

In 1990, we created the Women's Parliament, as a space for women to get together, discuss pressing socio-political issues and come up with strategies to address them publicly. One initiative was to go to Croatia to talk to prominent intellectuals and other public figures who were mostly, but not exclusively, women. We talked about possibilities of bottom up organising to prevent violence. I was among those who went to Zagreb. Our meetings were followed by public statements we issued. However, mobilization towards violence continued in full swing, because the federal republics continued relentlessly to spread fear and hatred.

At that point, there was an initiative to start mainstream politics participation, rather than to operate only outside of the state system. Hence, the Women's Party (ŽEST) was founded. One of the leading minds behind this initiative was my professor, supervisor, and dear friend, the late Andjelka Milić. The first founding meeting of the ŽEST party took place in my flat in Belgrade. Perhaps I should consider putting up a plaque! [laughs]

This party initiative did not go very far for various reasons. Personally, I grew uneasy about mainstream political engagement, because of my bitter disappoint-

ment with the official party politics in Yugoslavia, since the early 1980s. Ever since, I strongly felt that if I am to influence any social change, it has to be from outside the official political system. From below and from the margins.

In 1991, with the escalation of militarization, peace and anti-war groups emerged. First in Croatia, in July 1991, following a brief war of Slovenian secession in June 1991. Then, in October 1991, women in Belgrade/Serbia formed a chapter of the anti-war women's organization Women in Black, which has been active in Serbia ever since. Feminist anti-war groups started street protests that required enormous courage because, at the time, they could not get a permit to protest and they were not shielded by the police.

Feminism in socialist Yugoslavia was on the political margin, as that was the only available space for women's autonomous organizing. This has contributed to the creation of a socially and politically marginalized feminist community with its own alternative but isolated 'culture'. Their politics during state socialism can be described as 'anti-political politics', to borrow Havel's (1986) term, in a sense that feminists did not attempt to conceptualize their political activism as a potential part of the socialist state [...]. Consequently, most of their early protests against nationalism and its politics remained rather isolated from society at large. They were unable, therefore, to confront the 'patriarchal backlash' of nationalist politics and discourse and the subsequent process of militarization in any socially and politically significant way. However, at the time of the major violence and destruction, during the first years of the war(s), anti-war women's groups were, for the first time, gaining a wider social base and support from women from all walks of life. Regardless of this important shift, their public anti-war protests remained marginal, as did their quite remarkable success in keeping lines of communication open across the ethnic divide despite the exclusionary politics of war (Korac 2006, p. 516).

Maja wants to make it clear that her personal involvement and role in any of these initiatives and activism was minimal. She was not herself a member of any of the autonomous feminist groups that were created during that period. Maja knew many of the women activists, some of whom were her close friends. At the time, she attended some of the meetings of various groups, and also took part in many feminist initiatives. That is how she was among the women at the founding meeting of the Women's Parliament or the Women's Party ŽEST. However, as she mentioned in the interview, she grew weary of more formal political organizing, because she has started feeling that: 'any, however loose, form of organization inevitably turns into a cage of some kind, at some point. I was determined to avoid being locked into a cage again, regardless of its creators' good intentions.'

In an article in which she reviews feminist engagement with the sexual victimization of women in wars during the 1990s, Maja states:

As a person, a woman, and a feminist scholar from war-torn Yugoslavia, I did my best to support the peace processes, challenge nationalistic politics and fight against the victimization of women in war. In 1989, on the eve of the outbreak of armed violence in Yugoslavia, and throughout the 1990s, I was involved with local and international women's initiatives against nationalism and war in the region. As one of the founding members of the Women's Parliament (founded in 1989), as well as part of the Women in Black anti-war protests in Belgrade, London and Toronto, during the 1990s (Korac 2018, p. 1)

4. From 'Voluntary Exile' at the Start of the Yugoslav Wars to Life as 'Other' in the UK: Trauma, Privilege, and 'Othering'

4.1. Mobility Paths, Academic Trajectories, and Inescapable Identity Politics

Wars broke out in Yugoslavia in 1991; violent clashes and full-scale war(s) lasted a decade. In the fall of 1992, Maja went to Britain on a visiting scholarship. By that time, she had completed her MPhil, which was a required step towards a PhD in Yugoslavia, at the University of Belgrade.⁸ In the fall of 1993, she moved to Canada to do a PhD at York University in Toronto. Maja lived, studied, and worked in Toronto until returning to the UK in the summer of 1999 to take on a research position at the Refugee Studies Centre,

University of Oxford. At Oxford, she was the principal investigator of a comparative project on integration that, as Maja remarks, transformed into research about the processes of homemaking (Korac 2009).

When Maja left Belgrade, she was an early career academic with teaching and research experience. That one aspect of her identity remained unchanged by the turmoil of war. Her academic profession also made it possible for Maja not to return to Belgrade in the summer of 1993, when her scholarship to Britain ended. In an article on everyday bordering processes and socio-political labels associated with them (Korac-Sanderson 2016), Maja writes about her decision to leave and not to return:

I never left to leave. I went on a scholarship to Oxford. Just for one term. And then I got another one from the British Council. For an additional term, in London. I moved from Oxford to London just before Christmas 1992. By that time, I had already kind of acknowledged that the wars would not stop soon. My original plan to return, after my scholarships were over, no longer felt like a good one. [...] I did not want, if I could help it, to return and live a life framed by my ethnic origin, as if nothing else makes us and 'our' states worthwhile. Besides, I never felt 'ethnic' and I do not now. I do not understand what that category and label convey *about me*. As a person. I feel it as violence. A brutal form of enforcement of meaning upon my sense of self. An invasion of my identity and the multiplicity of its elements (Korac-Sanderson 2016, p. 108).

To me, this account conveys particularly strongly how deeply oppressive and reductionist the label 'Serbian' has felt for Maja. One of the central points that Maja highlights in her interviews is that many Serbs ended up between a rock and a hard place in the course of the war.

There are also over 200,000 educated and highly skilled people between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five who left the country. *This war is not their war, this leadership is not their leadership* [...] Among numerous problems they have to face [...] is the psychological burden of being labelled as one of 'them', the most savage, aggressive and cruel nation in the region (Korac 1993, p. 111)

Maja engages with her own experiences of voluntary exile in several publications of the 1990s, and explains her positionality in the following way:

The revival of ethnic-nationalism and the disintegration of a familiar social space disrupted my own sense of belonging and radically displaced me. It left me, I feel, without the option of being either Yugoslav or Serb. On the one hand, the geographical space that is still officially called Yugoslavia is without the essential cultural, political, and social markers with which I identified.⁹ On the other, from my own sense of self, it is impossible for me to identify as a Serb, because that would now imply acceptance of the values of "purification," "cleansing" of differences, and the process of exclusion. Thus, the place I am speaking from now, is somewhere in transition. It is a transition to a space where a new identity and new subjectivity can be articulated (Korac 1998a, p. 155).

Unfortunately, this space was not easy to find. It turned out that after moving abroad, it was near-impossible to escape the identity politics Maja unwillingly was caught up in.

4.2. *Living with Trauma and Confronting a 'Label of Shame'*

During one of our interviews, as Maja talks about her academic career moves, she mentions almost in passing how these moves occurred against the backdrop of Yugoslavia dissolving through various stages of violent conflict. In one of our meetings to clarify certain aspects of the interview transcripts, I point out to Maja that she engages little with the trauma of her own experiences of loss linked to the violent dissolution of her home country. In response, she adds the following text as part of our conversation:

In retrospect, the entire experience was far more traumatic for me than I was able to acknowledge at the time. I had to function. That all of it was extremely traumatic became clear to me much later, once I started to settle into a so-called ‘post-deep uncertainty’ era of my life. When I returned to Britain from Canada to start my first full-fledged academic position since I left my academic life in Belgrade, and after I found my soulmate in Mark with whom I have created a ‘home that transcends the geography of places’ (Korac 2020), some of these experiences have started to pop up demanding to be dealt with and articulated.

The trauma of loss was even more difficult to articulate because of Maja’s deep sense of powerlessness to do anything to prevent the war and the atrocities committed in her name. She recalls the pain of the time when she first came to Britain:

When I came to Britain, in 1992, I realized that people indeed don’t know much about the war that shattered my country and my life. I realised that there is no respite from that black and white picture that pretty much everybody took for granted. . . That first period was a particularly difficult period, because of that. All the tragic loss of so many lives, and destruction of the country that I loved so much. Plus, the *label of shame*.

Maja found it hard to be confronted with and bear, what she calls, a ‘label of shame’ after she left Belgrade, both emotionally and intellectually, particularly because she learned that this was equally true in academic settings.

The war was really a wound. And it was not just because it was happening there, and I was somewhere else. But also, because while the war was on, particularly during my initial time in Britain, it was a hot topic—politically, publicly, and in academia. So, I found myself in high demand [laughs]. I was invited to an endless number of different public and academic events in Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

It was a truly excruciating emotional experience for me to participate in these events as ‘an academic from Serbia’. In most cases, other panellists were from other parts of war-torn Yugoslavia, all of them expected to speak from a victim position. And there I was, in what at the time was an absolutely intolerable position for me. Central to my way of being is to speak up, but in these events, I was silenced, mute. Feeling that I could not say that I had also been victimized by the political developments that I or people like me could not stop. And there were literally hundreds of thousands of people like me in Serbia who were made invisible.

I felt strongly that I could not speak and have my voice heard. Instead, I would repeat the anti-nationalist and anti-war stuff that I used to say while in Belgrade. Also, always desperately trying to make a point that not all people there are monsters. . . All of it became emotionally so difficult for me that in the early spring of 1993 I told my friend Cynthia¹⁰ that I can no longer accept these invitations because I refuse to be a ‘rent-a-Serb’ panellist; that is how I felt, and it was a terrible position to be in

The clash between her sense of identity and the harsh reality of the disintegration of Yugoslavia is also a recurrent theme in Maja’s writings during the 1990s.

Since I have started my ‘voluntary’ exile here, in England, I have learned with sorrow that to Europeans [. . .] there are no ex-Yugoslav citizens, as individuals, there are just ethnic-nations, some regarded as better than others. There is a history as well, full of conflicts, injustices, causes and ‘objective’ explanations. From that ‘objective’ point of view a person like me no longer existed (Korac 1993, quoted in 1998a, p. 19).

Maja points out that it was through her experience particularly of the first year after she left Belgrade that she became painfully aware of the distortive power of the socio-political processes of the labelling and ‘othering’ of everyone and everything that does not conform. In one of our post-interview clarifying meetings, she adds that it took her seven years to be able to articulate for the first time the feelings of terror and anguish, when in 1999, the NATO started bombing Belgrade, the place in which some of the most important people in her life—including her parents—lived. In the summer of 2016, Maja wrote her side of ‘the NATO bombing story’:¹¹

Theatre

It was latish March in 1999. One of these late winter days in Toronto when one feels that enough is enough, knowing full well that there is much more to endure. As you can imagine, it was not a great start of a day. I had a seminar with my Research Methods students that afternoon. So, there was preparation and all, no time for much else on that gloomy day. Especially because I had to travel all the way up to York campus from the Annex, where I lived. It was a blessing to have close friends from York within a walking distance from where I lived. That made it feel a bit like Belgrade to me. By the time I returned home that evening, mind you, I did not feel that there was anything homely about it at all. But I am running ahead of myself here.

During the break of my regular two-hour seminar on that day, I went as always to one of the cafes on York Lane, to have one of my daily doses of nicotine and caffeine. I was still a smoker then, and smoking was still allowed. That is hard to imagine now, but I was lucky to have a cigarette at that moment! Because, while I was sitting at one of the tables with my coffee and a cigarette, I found myself staring at one of the TV screens hanging down from the ceiling. The volume was turned down, but the images were crystal clear. Something was burning, I thought at first, a big fire. But as I continued watching, now intrigued by the fire, I saw a bridge being blown into pieces. The next image really caught my attention, because I thought for a moment that I am seeing a building in Belgrade, the one I know so well, against a backdrop of what looked like spectacular fireworks. Actually, it is a building in Belgrade. I am not imagining, I realised almost simultaneously. The big fire was the start of a NATO campaign, as violent attacks on places and peoples by bombing them have been termed in the military, diplomatic, and academic jargon to accompany a new paradigm in International Relations, the one that marked the last decade of the 20th century. The theatre, yet another piece of jargon created, where this campaign ‘was showing’ happened to be my hometown.

Theatre it was, staging a tragedy of a deeply personal nature. My mama and dad. My sister and my nephew. My dear friends. My known and unknown neighbours. Nice and not so nice shopkeepers, waiters, hairdressers, teachers, bus drivers, postmen, and the rest of the fellow citizens of Belgrade. They were all there at that moment as I was watching the campaign unfolding. From Toronto, sitting in a busy café on York campus. At the very moment that the campaign was unfolding in front of my eyes, my ears were bombarded by the ‘French fries and a coke walking’ shouts by the staff at the bar. See, there is a proper way to use appropriate language to fit the context.

As there is also a proper way to do the appropriate thing in any given moment in life. As any well brought up and well-mannered person would tell you. I looked at my watch, I noted that it is the time to return to my students and the seminar I was responsible for. Responsibility. Professionalism. I did the seminar. I engaged with the students following the pre-planned class schedule. I went home. I called my parents. My father picks up the phone and I start wailing. His attempts to comfort me and bring me back to a state in which it is possible to talk were interrupted by loud, yes loud, even all these miles and an ocean away, sound of sirens. It’s best we talk again later—I could hear him saying between my sobs. We do not intend to go to the shelter, we are too old to do that. But let us handle this on our own, and I promise, I’ll be in touch later. Do not worry about us, he tells me from Belgrade at the moment when he was just about to be subjected to a

continuation of the campaign. 'Lightning never hits the nettles' he manages to say in a jovial manner using that old local proverb to convince me that they are untouchable. And the line went dead. Or so it felt. He did say 'ciao', and mama is kissing you.

I never told this to anybody. You are the first one to hear it.

4.3. A Sense of Privilege: Holding to Professional Identity and Moving on

Throughout our interviews, Maja's sense of privilege keeps reoccurring. She is deeply aware of the fact that her life abroad was very different from the situation of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled the Yugoslav wars. In comparison, Maja says, she lived an exceptionally privileged life not only because she actually left the country to take up a scholarship abroad and advance her professional career but also because she did not experience war violence first-hand. Maja's awareness of this difference is central to how she defines the place she speaks from, and she stresses this several times in the interviews. She explains, for example, her decision to go to Canada, in the autumn of 1993, to do her PhD there, and not in the UK, as she had both offers at the time.

I realized at that time, that to do a PhD in the UK, my legal options for staying were only to seek exceptional leave to remain, which would put me in the refugee category. And I simply could not bring myself to do it. It was an ethical and moral issue for me. I felt very strongly that there were many thousands of people who literally fled to save their lives. Hence, taking that route was absolutely out of the question.

Just how deep her sense of privilege ran becomes obvious from a story that Maja tells, which she also shares in her thesis (Korac 1998a, p. 66). Between 1992 and early 2000, an annual international meeting of anti-war women's groups from all parts of the war-torn country, as well as international women participants was held in Serbia. For one of the conferences, held during one of Maja's PhD related research visits, she was asked to hold a presentation. Maja tells me how her deep sense of privilege as someone who did not experience the war first-hand, made her extremely uneasy about the idea and how she was persuaded by Staša Zajović, the founder of the Women in Black, Belgrade, to speak. In her thesis, she writes:

Stasa was very surprised at how I felt, and argued that my reflections on the problem were important because my position as an 'insider' as well as an 'outsider', provided me with a perception that was not readily available to feminist activists who were immersed in day-to-day work. (Korac 1998a, p. 66)

While her sense of being an outsider was based on the fact that she lived elsewhere and could choose to leave Belgrade at any time during her research visits, in actual fact, Maja had engaged in political activism in Belgrade before her voluntary exile and continued to do so after she left. She again highlights her privilege when she says:

I am fully aware that however all this was difficult for me, it was also a story of extreme privilege compared to so many millions of other people. Not just from the Yugoslav conflicts. How many people like me have ended up in horrible places like Calais. Without any chances whatsoever. Thus, for me to say, "I actually suffered from what I lived through", feels really deeply ethically problematic. Compared to so many other lives, mine was almost paved with gold [laughs]. I never did anything else but my academic job. If I am to be labelled using one of the categories created to 'describe' me, I would be labelled as a professional being abroad to develop her career.

There is no doubt in Maja's mind that she was, indeed, a professional on a scholarship abroad at the start of war in her country, and that she remained a professional abroad throughout her life ever since. Yet she argues that that category, and the privilege that was seen to come with it, stood in the way of acknowledging and understanding both the

violent conflict she witnessed, the traumatic losses she experienced and the reality of her life as it unfolded in Britain.

4.4. *Becoming 'Other' in Britain*

Paradoxically, Maja reflects, she felt for the first time that she had no place to call 'home', upon returning to Britain to take up a position at Oxford, after the completion of her PhD, and after becoming a Canadian citizen:

Many important, life-changing things happened while I was in Canada and before I moved back to Europe to the next stage of my life. PhD completed, fieldwork and successful fundraising experience gained, first book in English published (Korac 1998b), Canadian citizenship acquired. All looked very nice. Except that I was moving during the time of the NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo; my parents and everyone who was dear to me, lived there. It is an understatement to say that it was a terribly difficult situation to handle.

Preparing for the move, I realised that I would be leaving Toronto without any keys in my pocket. No door to lock when I leave and no door to unlock when I arrive there. It was a truly devastating feeling. . . . I shared it with my close friends and colleagues Pat and Wenona¹², and they said, 'don't worry, we'll give you the key to our houses and you can come back whenever you want'. That was precious. These kinds of gestures from people I met throughout my journey, literally saved my life.

Returning to Britain was also difficult because she was constantly reminded of her otherness, something she had not experienced in Canada. During our interviews, Maja repeatedly comes back to the issue of being seen as an 'Other' among the British:

Being from elsewhere in Europe—and especially in Britain—is very different from being from elsewhere in Canada. Unlike in Canada, in Britain, I am constantly asked where I am from, because my accent suggests that I am not 'genuine'. The way I speak puts me in the category 'Other'. And frankly, after all these decades and movements, I do not think that I can answer that question in any straightforward way.

If I am to use social science categories to describe myself, I am fully integrated in British society, after returning from Canada. I have a university position. I became married to a British academic. Consequently, I am embedded within mainstream society. However, this means nothing in terms of a host of processes of othering, subtle and not so subtle, which make me feel the odd one out.

As is evident from Maja's stories about her family history and her upbringing, her own and her family's values are fundamentally different from the processes of othering she has experienced in Britain. Maja writes:

What has been a source of acute pain during all these decades, though, and what I am still grappling with, are those continuous bordering processes that are part of daily othering systems and misidentifying practices in our lives—particularly in the lives of *we*, who are labelled as 'migrants', 'immigrants', 'emigrants', 'foreigners', or 'others,' who are also coded as 'ethnic' or 'racial' or somehow 'visibly' different. And that is how one becomes *invisible*. Erased. As a person. As someone. As a life with a history and a meaning. Beyond any attempt to box you in and shelve you with 'others' (Korac-Sanderson 2016, p. 109).

As I reflect on what Maja tells me, I see the continuum along which forms of 'othering' operate. She makes a strong case to argue that she faces 'continuous bordering processes that are part of daily othering systems and misidentifying practices in our lives'. The kind of label that is being attached to her is not the same. During the Yugoslav Wars her ethnic identity came to override any other personal characteristics, whereas in the UK, she is

mostly faced with labels like migrant, foreigner, or 'other'. But what is similar is that she is coded as ethnically or racially different and from that moment becomes invisible as a person and reduced to a mere label. While there are obvious substantial differences in the magnitude of the human consequences of such forms of labelling and othering in a context of violent conflict versus in a functioning democracy, I would argue that it is crucial to understand the similarities in the underlying patterns and the ease with which people can reduce an individual to a particular trait and from there extrapolate elaborate 'knowledge' about this individual.

5. Academic Research as Activism for Social Justice and Change: Feminist Analysis, Politics and Knowledge Creation

The violent breakup of her country, and her experiences of it, led Maja to dedicate her academic career to related topics. Ever since, her research, publications, and teaching focused on the gendered aspects of conflict, sexual violence in war, and forced displacement. Through this academic engagement she confronted epistemic as well as socio-political barriers to seeing beyond the black and white of war.

5.1. Addressing Gendered Consequences of Violent Conflict: Feminist Scholarship versus Local and International Politics

In her doctoral work, Maja engaged with the gendered aspects of ethno-national struggles, and war violence. She examined how gender power relations affect these (violent) processes. Central to Maja's PhD fieldwork were interviews with local women activists and refugee women who fled Croatia and Bosnia. The majority of them were Serbs, many were from ethnically mixed marriages. There was also a significant minority of Croatian or Bosnian Muslim women who fled to Serbia, because their husbands were Serbs from these regions. Most of the women activists she interviewed were anti-war activists that Maja knew through her previous engagement with the protests. These women were also working with refugee women, helping them overcome the devastating consequences of their multiple losses.

Conducting the interviews with refugee women were the most difficult. Maja writes in her thesis:

It is an understatement to say that I found the interviewing process difficult. On many occasions I felt very angry, frustrated and depressed by the women's revelations concerning experiences with the social and political turmoil in the post-Yugoslav states. Interviews with refugee women were particularly difficult, emotionally draining and disturbing. I found it impossible to conduct a consecutive interview without having a considerable amount of time to recover emotionally and, in a sense, to recompose myself. Some of the stories I found extremely emotionally disturbing and I felt, at times, that I needed counselling (Korac 1998a, p. 64).

The phenomenological understanding of the importance of the body for holistic knowledge is central to some of Maja's writing and publications (e.g., Korac-Sanderson 2016). The embodied nature of knowledge creation also affected her doctoral and other research, since language, emotions, and experienced, unconscious, or remembered knowledge are closely connected. She tells me that she was able to process the research data for her thesis only after working with the translated transcripts, which did not overwhelm her senses in the way that the original transcripts did:

When I was reading the original transcripts, I realised that they bring back the entire interview atmosphere, feelings included. At one point, I picked up a translated transcription, which I also had, and I realized that it did not trigger any emotional baggage I carried [. . .] Because it was in a different language, I was detached from the interview situation.

Maja's senses, emotions and memories connect temporally separated realities in a way that gives her access to past experiences, not just cognitively but also sensorially. In the original language, the transcripts evoked the powerful emotions and memories she experienced during the actual interview (Korac 1998a, p. 69).

She felt that her doctoral and related research on the gendered consequences of ethno-nationalism and war was *her contribution to anti-war efforts*. During the 1990s, she published prolifically and spoke regularly about the Yugoslav wars of succession, focusing on violence against women in these wars. While she was at York University in Toronto, Maja was also one of the founding members of the Women in Conflict Zones Network (WICZNET); an international network of scholars, practitioners, and women activists who engaged in work with women in zones of conflict. Part of its activities was a comparative project on the situation of women in Sri Lanka and war-torn Yugoslavia. It brought together women anti-war activists for exchanges, learning, and identifying good practices. She also co-edited a book (Korac et al. 2003) linked to this academic-activist endeavor.

Maja points out that she is particularly content that she belongs to the generation of women, feminist scholars, and activists who were engaged in efforts to make sexual violence and the rape of women in war visible and recognized as a war crime. She explains: '[t]he Yugoslav wars of succession (1992–1995) and the Rwandan genocide (1994) brought the theme of sexual violence in war onto the international agenda' (Korac 2018, p. 1). This shift was instigated, Maja writes (Korac 2018), through the activism of local women during the first years of the Yugoslav conflicts. The first written accounts and analyses of the rape of women in Bosnia–Herzegovina were disseminated by local feminist groups in 1992–1993 (Batinic cited in Korac 2018), because they were appealing for support for female survivors of sexual violence in war. They were also searching for ideas on how to apply political pressure on international institutions to act.

She also reflects upon the fact that the implementation of the recognition of this specific type of sexual violence against women as a 'war crime' had mixed results:

The recognition of rape of women in war as 'war crime', however, did not stop this despicable type of victimisation of women. It did not even help the women victims of rape during Yugoslav wars, nor those who were raped in wars that broke out later. In actual fact, this legal victory has often contributed to their further victimisation, because of the still prevailing gender insensitive justice and court systems. Or because they were victimised in their communities after testifying in court. Regardless of these extremely serious problems, this very change of the international law positively marked an era because it brought about *a possibility* of their legal protection.

Her publications provide further insight on her reflections on activism for social justice. In a range of articles, she has revisited the anti-war engagements of local feminists in Yugoslavia, exploring both what they achieved, where they failed, and how their impact might have been more substantial. In an article on gender, conflict, and peacebuilding, Maja explains the importance of feminist action in terms of 'the politics of small steps' metaphor. She argues that, since ethnicity is effectively used as a tool of war, spreading fear and hatred among communities, 'any search for reconciliation has to address problems on the communal level, like issues of loss of trust and broken networks' (Korac 2006, p. 511). This long-term process of 'promoting inter-group connections and focusing on support for civic rather than ethnic politics and political engagement' (ibid, p. 512) is crucial to efforts to challenge the politics of exclusion common in war. However, Maja suggests that such politics of small steps cannot change things so much as set them in motion, and ultimately, she argues, they need to be supported by powerful international actors. She points out, however, that such activism was regrettably side-lined after the wars during the post-wars period in the region by 'quick fix' approaches to liberal piece initiatives (Korac 2006, p. 512).

She offers a strong critique of liberal peacebuilding, arguing that international efforts disregarded local ownership and in particular ignored civic peacebuilding initiatives by marginalizing groups that were working across divides through inter-ethnic, community-

based initiatives, such as those brought about by women's groups. She points out that this is not just a missed opportunity but in fact has exacerbated the situation and led to the deadlock situation of today.

International players involved in humanitarian interventions are not prone to recognise and encourage the politics of 'small steps', which are inherent in many grassroots movements and initiatives, and particularly in women's groups. Current humanitarian responses to new wars are oriented toward 'quick fix solutions' or momentary peace-making, rather than long-term peacebuilding approaches, which are central to addressing humanitarian, socio-economic and political problems of new wars and their aftermath. (Korac 2006, pp. 517–18)

A decade after writing this article, Maja wrote an article on feminist anti-war organizing, in which she follows the developments of such civic engagements to date, explaining how Women in Black continue to protest and commemorate but face crack-down within the context of Serbian nationalism (Korac 2016). In this article, she identifies flaws not just in the international humanitarian approach to grassroots anti-war organizing, especially by feminists, but also in the internal approach of these feminist groups. Maja argues that, while feminists did recognize the importance of not just understanding the consequences of war for women but also of how conceptions of masculinity relate to processes of war and underpin war-related violence, they did not sufficiently integrate this understanding into their activities and political demands. She asks 'how peace can be inclusive and sustainable if it does not include considerations of both women and men as experiencing the negative consequences of war violence and heightened concerns for human security, in both war and post-war situations' (Korac 2016, p. 438).

5.2. Tackling Gendered War Violence: Critical Engagement with Maja's Published Work

Maja emphasizes the importance of understanding masculinities in war. Her work on masculinities, since the early 1990s, long before this became more mainstream thought, argues that feminists should include men and masculinities in their studies because doing so is necessary to reshape homogenous and essentialist notions of male and female. She claims that both women and men should be recognized 'as gendered actors who engage in and are affected by this type of war in different ways', rather than thinking in simplistic terms of victims and perpetrators (Korac 2006, p. 518). In order to undermine power systems that engender victimizations, she argues, a shift away from a hierarchy of victimization to a relational understanding of the gendered processes of victimization in war and peace is needed (Korac 2016). This will ultimately reshape the notions of masculinity and femininity, and allow for a more nuanced conceptualization of men and women as both victims and perpetrators.

A central theme of her more recent article on anti-war feminists in which she revisits the issue of victims and perpetrators (Korac 2018). Here, she considers how transformation is achieved systematically by exploring the feminist 'victory' of making sexual violence and the rape of women in war visible and recognized as a war crime. She shows how the efforts of local feminists in Yugoslavia, including herself, contributed to this major international political and juridical shift: 'At the time, I felt that all the work, both political and scholarly, compassion and empathy that characterised feminists' engagement during the 1990s had the ultimate positive impact on the situation of women in war zones' (Korac 2018, p. 1).

Maja calls for a more nuanced conceptualization of men and women as both victims and perpetrators as a way to transform women's organizing against sexual violence into a systemic struggle against gendered war violence (Korac 2018). The article powerfully argues that essentialized, complementary notions of both men and women underpin the gendered workings of power in war. Drawing on Barry (2011), Maja explains how the construction, through socialization, of men as protectors, as heroic and superior, is one of the central pillars of the oppressive gender power systems inherent in patriarchal nation-states. During war, this 'translates into the obligation to kill and the expectation to sacrifice their own lives' (Korac 2018, p. 6). This expendability means men are simultaneously

perpetrators and victims of the system; they often cope with this duality, she argues, by disconnecting from and suppressing their humanity, which is necessary because of the extreme sanctions against men who reject violent masculinity in times of war. Maja's key point is that it is crucial to 'conceptualise gendered victimization as relational and to demand *gender integrated* interventions at multiple levels: state, community, and individual' (Korac 2018, p. 10).

By questioning one-dimensional understandings of 'victims' and 'perpetrators', Maja continued to confront the black and white approach to war. She points out that it is estimated that there were hundreds of thousands of young men who fled Serbia and other Yugoslav successor states to avoid conscription in a war they did not want to fight (Korac 2018). However, they had no right to international protection, although as deserters they faced up to 10 years in prison if deported. Not only were the warring states abusing the rights of men to life by forcible conscription, Maja argues, but the EU states also viewed it as the right of a sovereign state to do so, despite their apparent engagement to stop the wars these men were refusing to fight. She contends that this does not expose the duplicity of international politics, as some may see it, but the deep patriarchy that structures nation-states and their international institutions and actions. While states have a sovereign right to call 'their men' to war, Maja points out, there is no genuine way to change unequal gender relations of power nationally or internationally (Korac 2018).

Maja's life and research powerfully show the need to move from a hierarchy of victimization to a relational understanding of the processes of victimization, whether they draw on essentializations based on gender, ethnicity, skin color, religion, or other identity markers. The simplistic representations of victims and perpetrators, of minorities and the privileged, prevent us from seeing the relational construction of power structures and the fact that not all individuals with particular identity markers hold the same power and take the same position. Furthermore, the categories are narratively defined in relation to each other. Those systematically fighting injustices of all kinds often focus on particular stories of victimization and adopt a black-and-white understanding of categories of people and their positions, finding little use for other stories. This is disturbingly similar to what people who aim to create essentialized ethno-national states do. The narrative requirements of their storytelling contribute to labelling people as villains, victims, or heroes. But such categories leave no place—for example—for Serbian anti-war protesters or for men who refuse to fight an ethno-national war that is not theirs.

5.3. 'Objectivity' and Positionality: Navigating Different Approaches to Knowing

The realization that even in academia, the one area that had provided continuity in Maja's sense of identity during the early 1990s, she could not escape the identity politics of the wars in her country, must have been a terrible blow to her.

There were colleagues who questioned what I was saying because of 'my ethnicity'. I remember when one of my articles was peer reviewed for an American journal in which it was later published (Korac 1998c). I was explicitly asked to declare my 'ethnic and hence, political position'. And I did, starting the paragraph and the sentence with: 'For those who are interested in the messenger and not only in the message, I am. . .'

What helped me during that difficult process of being made to feel that everything I do or say requires a special moral, ethical, and 'security' scrutiny, is that I, as a feminist scholar, was able to express and explain my own position as a researcher, and also to reflect upon difficulties I had due to my own positionality during the research.

Maja's questioning of conventional academic approaches seems to have intensified with her post-doctoral research project at Oxford. She points out how, while she had discussed her positionality extensively in her PhD and related publications on gender and

violent conflict published in the 1990s, she felt that there was no space, at the time, to do that within the more mainstream approach to refugee studies at Oxford.

The experience of research within a more mainstream scholarly discipline made Maja realize that widely accepted scholarly language and categories are not capable of expressing the nuanced role of positionalities that are extremely important to processes of knowing and understanding.

Over time, I have become dissatisfied by scholarly attempts to create categories that are tidier than life, to borrow the term from my colleague and dear friend Sandra Wallman (Wallman 1986), because they create a world of knowing that is far from actually understanding anything. Such categories certainly do not help understand conflict situations. I am saying this because I am not only part of that specific area of study, academically, but I also feel that I am, in a way, the subject of study. I lived with it. This is one view of conflict that is seldom, if ever, addressed. And I think that that has to change if we are to claim that we contribute to knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. And we claim all that, but our view and approach is so terribly limited.

As I understand it, the core of Maja's critique here is that academia creates an abstraction of reality that fails to capture the embodied knowledge about war of those who have experienced it. As a consequence, academic work often creates essentialist categories that inadvertently contribute to reproducing the 'othering' that so many wars are based on.

In her book *Remaking Home*, Maja explains how her lived experience of displacement has shaped her approach to the process of knowledge production in the field of refugee studies:

This first-hand experience of displacement and of the struggle to emplace myself professionally, socially, culturally, and legally, prompted me to question many of the concepts and much of the knowledge produced about refugees. It made me aware, for example, how the notion of 'community', to which, somehow, all people coming from the same country naturally belong, or for which they strive, can straight-jacket our understanding of the processes of nesting of refugees who may, and often do, have different ideas about connecting and belonging. In the case of people coming from Yugoslavia and its successor states, the understanding of community also had specific connotations. The conflict brought to the attention of the international media, public, political, and academic realms the issue of ethnic difference, the grievances, and animosities within the region. As a consequence, interpreting and understanding these differences and constructing the 'identity' and the community' of those labelled by their ethnicity became central to approaching people from the war-torn country as well as to creating knowledge about them. This experience made me particularly sensitive to the processes and consequences of labelling people who were forced into decisions to flee their homes, the processes associated with institutional and legal systems, as well as those relating to public discourses and professional/academic settings (Korac 2009, p. 2).

Maja's story about her life and research demonstrates that academia is complicit in oversimplified categorizations that lead to processes of othering. Based on her experience as an academic studying a war in her home country, she makes a number of important observations. First, she warns against creating 'categories that are tidier than life' (Wallman 1986), because doing this not only leads to a simplification of reality but also impacts that reality in fundamental ways. Essentializing and reductionist categories move back and forth between academia, a range of legal and bureaucratic systems, public discourse, and policy. Maja's experience points to the fact that many academic experts have little understanding of the incredibly complex histories and socio-political contexts in which conflicts take place, whereas those with in-depth knowledge through lived experience from these places are often brought into debates as the representatives of a particular community

or experience rather than as experts. And yet, experiential, embodied knowledge is central for gaining a better understanding of violent conflict.

5.4. Making Sense of Lived Experience and Creation of Knowledge: In Lieu of Conclusion

As Tamboukou (2010) reminds us, in reference to Arendt's understanding of 'narrated life', people need to tell their stories to others in order to grasp their story's historical understanding. That is how 'meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence' (Arendt, cited in Kristeva 2001, p. 9). Indeed, 'entangled intra-relating', to borrow Barad's (2007) phrase, triggered by the interviews with Cindy, brought about precious revelations. I always felt that my research is my form of action for positive social change. However, it was not until my life story was 'iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action' (Barad 2007, p. ix) in relation to the interviews with Cindy that I was able to grasp a fuller meaning of my professional and life engagement in the past decades. An integral part of this process, and very important one at that, includes Cindy's careful and engaged reading and interpreting of my published work.¹³ All of that work was, indeed, fundamentally personal, as well as political. It was rooted in the 'materiality and politics of location' from within which I have been trying to make knowledge claims, to paraphrase Stavrevska et al. (2023, p. 3). It was the story of the wars and their human consequences from the point of view of someone who refuses to surrender ground to the socio-political conditions of life where ethno-national and cultural differences have to be transgressed.

This approach that took into consideration my experience of a specific historic time was always linked to my firm refusal to give up my deeply felt sense of self, of what I stand for, and who I want to become. This has been a type of resistance that was extremely difficult to hold given the lack of socio-political categories for my voice to be 'classified' and, hence, heard and understood. Political and geopolitical binaries created by the protagonists of wars or those internationally engaged in efforts to stop it, muted people like me, and made us invisible. In this sense, my life history narrative is as much generational as it is personal. The only non-binary category left for those of my generation who are from the region and who share this kind of multi-cultural sense of self and identity has been *nostalgia*. It is the one that boxes me in, puts me away, and displays me in a museum of waxworks. A reality that has been a trigger for rebellion, as much as a template for resignation. The interview interactions with Cindy, however, and my further engagement with the process of my life storytelling, helped unleash insight into what Barad calls the 'entangled practices of knowing *and* being' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, p. 37). It renewed the sense of purpose of the work I have done and the projects I have chosen to engage with.

My interviews and related engagements with Cindy turned into a 'sense-making' process that, as Barad and Gandorfer (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, p. 29) explain, 'is never an individual affair, nor does it happen once and for all [...] It is always iterative and collaborative', proposed *agential realism* (Barad 2007; Barad and Gandorfer 2021) as an 'opening up of thought', a type of thinking, which is always a 'material practice of being in touch with and being inseparable from the specific phenomenon being investigated' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, p. 29). Agential realism, brought about by the intra-relating process of auto/biography storytelling, made me aware that in my research as well as in my life since the violent break-up of my country and my subsequent move abroad, I was continuously and persistently countering dichotomies or 'boundary-drawing practices that enact power relations' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, p. 29). Those emanating from identity and/or war politics or those binary scholarly categories that were created to 'explain' and 'understand' the *object* of academic research. This persistent struggle was the expression of my 'yearning for justice'. Barad (2007, in Barad and Gandorfer 2021, p. 46) defines it as 'the undoing of exclusion without taking away from differencing' and as such, is 'not morality, but responsive ethical relationality with the other'. Within the socio-historic circumstances of my life, I realized, the responsive ethical relationality with the other was the only trajectory I could have taken in order to remain true to my *evolving, yet grounded*, sense of self.

Equally important was the revelation that it is acceptable to voice the trauma of the past. That, indeed, it may be recognized that ‘even someone privileged like me’ can be affected by the violence of a war that I never experienced first-hand, and for which ‘my people’ have been held responsible. Furthermore, as Cindy noted, my confrontation with ‘the black and white of war’ has been indeed continuous and present in all my published work. Likewise, her argument that the current approaches to studying conflict are linked to a problematic and limiting approach to what knowledge and expertise are and who can claim them is, indeed, a recognition of my own struggle with epistemic practices of separation between being and knowing. Finally, Cindy’s acknowledgement of ‘a similarity between the processes of othering’ occurring in wartime and peacetime Europe of the 1990s, regardless of their fundamentally different human consequences, has been significant in how I view, in retrospect, the three decades of resistance to the processes of ‘othering’ and binary approaches to the realities of our lives. This has been equally important in re-boosting my resolve, scholarly and otherwise, to speak up and not to give up. As, indeed, there were times when the burden felt too heavy to carry, when it felt almost impossible to stand up and speak up. Back in 2016, I wrote one of my *academic stories* as I call them, in which I was finally able to articulate some of the difficulties I encountered, and which I feel I am able to share, now.

Responsibility to Protect

I have been teaching an undergraduate course on conflict, intervention and development at a British university for nearly two decades. Little did I know when I started teaching it, how popular it would become. And it was very popular. Despite the grim topic. And grim it is, indeed. Ghastly questions to cover. Who gets the privilege to be bombed into the Stone Age in the name of humanitarianism, and who does not? Which people, once bombed into their deaths, get to be buried in a mass, unmarked grave with the ‘collateral damage’ label?

Picture yourself in my shoes. How does it feel to you? How do you see yourself engaging students in an active process of learning and understanding some of the greatest International Relations concepts and paradigms of the late 20th and the early 21st century, as some would argue? Humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect, known also as R2P to those who talk only to themselves. And all of that, it goes without saying, you do in the scholarly way. Objectively, that is. How else to do it, given that scholarly approach is objective and methodologically sound. It is as simple as that. Well, there has been the postmodern turn in social sciences and also that thought-provoking anthropology stuff about being an engaged observer. Not to mention feminist epistemologies and standpoint theories. But the ‘scholarly’ way is still prevailing seen as the view from nowhere, however difficult it may seem to picture that type of view of any-body.

How would you explain to students the idea of humanitarian intervention without letting your deeply personal views on the subject distort the true meaning of it? As a scholar, I am not supposed to burden them with my biased and limited views. Based on my personal experience. Surely, that is not scholarly work. What can they learn from it, after all? As a social science scholar, I am in the business of producing knowledge, as I am repeatedly reminded by the neoliberal power structures in British universities and society. And true knowledge is based on methodologically sound paradigms, all of which exclude me as a person. I am only there as a scholar, as a role, not as a life. And an embodied life at that.

And my life during the last decade of the 1990s was more than eventful! At the time of the so-called NATO campaign unleashed on my hometown, I was furious. Oh yes, I was. But that very anger was also making me sick with guilt. Not because I was not there. Not because bombs were not dropping on my head too. Oh, I wish it was that simple. But it wasn’t. Far from it. I felt guilty beyond words for worrying about my loved ones and for caring about the people and places that are labelled as ‘genocidal’, ‘barbaric’, and ‘backward’ or referred to as ‘collateral damage’. I felt ashamed and somehow beastly for being concerned about them at all, let alone for being emotional. Everybody knows

that scholars do not get emotional. All this is certainly distorting my judgement as a social science scholar about what is right and what is wrong. And who do I have the responsibility to protect. As a scholar, a social scientist who is in business of producing knowledge and impacting a positive social change.

Cindy's and my contrapuntal approach to our work on my life history narrative was critical for my ability to acknowledge and voice the painful tension between essentialist categories that operate within the mainstream academia, and its approaches to the social world, which it aims to explain and *know*. Our engagement also became central to my newly emerging ability to continue with my scholarly work on varied, non-binary, experience-based knowledge and understanding of conflict situations and their consequences for different people/actors. Including those who do research and create knowledge in challenging, often messy, circumstances and moments in history. They are often silenced or muted by institutionally imposed self-doubt, linked to unequal institutional power relations. It brought me back to the work of feminist scholars who argue for reflexive social science (Collins 2000; Harding 1986; Hooks 1984; Smith 1987). A field of study that recognizes the *social relations of knowledge creation*. Hence, this process made me aware who and what I have the responsibility to protect. In doing so, it prompted me to reengage with the growing scholarly contestations of patterns of authority, exclusion, and power (Lisle et al. 2017) within different social science fields, linked to the still prevailing understanding of social science knowledge as 'objective' and 'disinterested', and in studies of conflict, in particular.

These revelations are closely linked to the realization that the process of narration is uniquely political, relational and embodied, as Cavarero ([1997] 2000) has argued. They are also linked to the act of 'listening as political practice and as a mode of understanding' (Tamboukou 2020), that Cindy adopted by tracing in my story 'the dynamics of thinking differently', beyond what seems to be 'obvious' (Tamboukou 2021). This precious process made me feel *visible* after a very long time. It opened a possibility of (re)gaining the vocabulary to express *who* I am and how it has been for me as a human being *within* a professional role and identity, as well as within an ascribed ethnic identity during a specific historic time. It enabled me to explain my lived experience, as contested and political (Scott 1991, p. 797), and allowed me to repossess my life and identity—individual, professional, collective. This also re-opened a possibility to challenge further the notion of 'true knowledge' that is presumably based on 'methodologically sound paradigms', all of which exclude me as a person, as *who*, as a life.

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Notes

- ¹ The life history part of this article is a shorter version of the piece that was to be published in Cindy's book (Horst 2023). I took the cutting decisions and the related necessary restructuring of the life history text that became the core part of this article. These changes, however, did not substantively alter the original content or the structure of the life history section of this paper, as our aim has been to preserve its original narrative format and approach. The shortening of the original life history text only tightened it and made it more relevant for its 'I am the evidence' focus (Korac 1991).
- ² Conflict-induced displacement linked to the Yugoslav wars of secession during the 1990s was, at the time, the largest refugee movement in Europe since the second WW. This article and my life history narrative account relate to these well-documented and analysed events only as a backdrop, to reveal the problems of performing research and producing knowledge related to these deeply disturbing events—from a personal, humanitarian, and political perspective. Equally, this was a background for our engagement with my sense of privilege in how, when, why, and where I moved during the war; the experience that was not shared by many, but a few from the region. Those interested in the refugee movements from and within Yugoslavia of the 1990s, are encouraged to consult relevant academic sources, including my book (Korac 1991, 2009).
- ³ In the public discourse, as well as in academic settings, there is hardly any memory left of the basic facts about socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991). It is usually referred to as an 'East European' country, which is geographically incorrect and socio-politically misleading because it implies a 'communist' label wrapped up in ideologies and power struggles of the day, without any actual qualification of the system it is meant to denote. I mention here the most important characteristics of the Yugoslav socialist state and society. In 1948, the Yugoslav Communist party was expelled from the Soviet/Stalin-led Cominform (Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, founded in 1947 and dissolved in 1957, because of its independently defined international, regional, and national politics. Since then, the country continued to forge its own way (for more, see Banac (1988)). Internationally, it became one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), created in 1961, at the founding conference held in Belgrade. The founding conference had 25 members, the 9th conference, also held in Belgrade, in 1989, a couple of years before Yugoslavia ceased to exist, had 103 (Rajan 1989). The UN, at the time, had 159 member states (www.un.org) (accessed on 21 September 2023). The Non-Aligned movement was dedicated to representing and voicing the interests of developing countries without being formally aligned or against any major power bloc (for more on the NAM see Rajak (2017)). Nationally, Yugoslavia introduced the workers' self-management system, in 1950. This *market-based* allocation of the social ownership of the means of production, i.e., land, labour, and capital, was intended to separate the management of companies from the state (this is not to say that this intention was fully achieved or that the process was problem-free). Self-management was also meant to represent a *third*/non-aligned form of Yugoslav economic system—not the US capitalist or the Soviet state-controlled. Socially, socialist Yugoslavia was a society with good education and open cultural systems. My British husband and I are of the same generation, as well as level of education, and we grew up influenced by the same type of literature, art, films, music, and TV series.
- ⁴ Irrespective of these initial political and ideological barriers, quite a few of the contacts made with people while we were in the US turned into lifelong family friendships. Some of them came to visit us in Belgrade, during their travels in Europe. Others sent their children to stay with us during their vacation. With a daughter of one of the closest friends of my family from that time, my sister and I remain in contact to this day.
- ⁵ In the interview, I recognised later, I got carried away by the memories of my father as a meticulous planner of our family trips that he, indeed, was. After careful re-reading, I realised that as a result, my father remained in the focus of my story. This led to me omitting to mention an important person in my family story and life—my mother. In actual fact, both of my parents' lines of work and professional carriers provided them, and all of us as a family, with vital, continuous, and dynamic pan-Yugoslav contacts. Many of these initially professional communications turned into valuable friendships. Throughout my life in Belgrade, our family home was the place of frequent, lively (and delicious!) dinner parties with colleagues/friends from different parts of Yugoslavia who happened to be in Belgrade for work or leisure. Equally, over my childhood and young adult life, my parents hosted numerous home gatherings with my father's international professional contacts from the US, Europe, Japan, and from the mid-1980s onwards—China. Most of them were academics and were in Belgrade in contact with my father, because they were interested in the self-management system that was the economic mechanism Yugoslavia was pioneering, as mentioned in the footnote no. 4.
- ⁶ Yugo-slav means South-Slav in the local language/s. It is important to note here that Yugoslavia was not a country inhabited only by South Slavs, but also by a considerable number of minority non-Slav groups. While their rights were secured and guaranteed, by Yugoslav post-second WW constitution, there were instances and periods in Yugoslav socialist history of discrimination and racism (for information on the merits and the shortcomings of the post-second WW Yugoslav minority rights constitutional system, see Varady (1993)). However, my South-Slav multicultural identity mentioned here, refers to my flexible and inclusive national identification with all peoples of Yugoslavia.
- ⁷ In addition to granting women a wide range of rights, socialist Yugoslavia had also quite a significant number of women involved in politics, and in a range of positions of power. They viewed their emancipation through the Marxist, working-class lens, without challenging deeply ingrained patriarchy in the lives of ordinary people and women (for more information see Morokvasic 1983).
- ⁸ Maja's Book is based on a one-year ethnographic MPhil research project in a village in Serbia.

- ⁹ At the time of writing, there was still a state entity called Yugoslavia consisting of Serbia, including its two autonomous provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo, and Montenegro, while the other four former republics of the federation had already seceded.
- ¹⁰ My colleague and friend, the late Cynthia Cockburn whom I first met in Belgrade in the late 1980s, when she was there to do research on feminist anti-nationalist and anti-war organising in the country.
- ¹¹ It was through this interview process that I felt that it was the time for me to publish this account, hence, it is now included. It refers to the start of the NATO-led intervention in Serbia and Kosovo, an aerial bombing campaign that lasted 79 days, from March to June 1999. It aimed to stop armed conflict in Kosovo, which was at the time an Autonomous Province of Serbia. The Province's Albanian majority population wanted an independent state. As the Serbian government was not willing to negotiate, armed conflict broke out between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian Army (for more information see [Ristić and Satjukow \(2022\)](#)).
- ¹² Patricia McDermott and Wenona Giles were both professors at York University, in Toronto, at the time.
- ¹³ Cindy has been the single most careful and thoughtful reader of my publications. I am grateful for this open and truly curious engagement with what I have written in the past 30 years.

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