

**‘It’s not their job to soldier’: distinguishing civilian and military in soldiers’ and interpreters’ accounts of peacekeeping in 1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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Abstract:

Peacekeeping operations throw the use of specialized military forces and the aim of accomplishing change in a civilian environment into contradiction. Organizations with cultures that facilitate warfighting have to reorient themselves towards achieving peace and consent rather than victory, making peacekeeping a process of constant intercultural encounters between ‘military’ and ‘civilian’ as well as between ‘international’ and ‘local’. The force’s local employees, civilians necessary in the force’s military tasks, inhabited a particularly ambiguous position. Based on more than 30 oral history interviews with peacekeepers and local interpreters who worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this paper shows how four dimensions of cultural and bodily difference emerged from their narratives: uniforms, weapons, disruptiveness and training.

Keywords:

peacekeeping

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Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) blurred the concepts of civilian and military on various levels, from the actual mission and its restrictions on using force to the tasks involved in accomplishing the mission and the very space of the bases where soldiers served.<sup>1</sup> International troops first travelled to BiH in 1992 as the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), mandated to guard humanitarian convoys and guarantee the demilitarization of the UN Safe Areas. After December 1995 and the Dayton Peace Agreement, the multinational military force came under NATO control with a new mission to implement Dayton and provide continuing security. Personnel rotated in and out of BiH at regular (usually six-month) intervals, writing one or more tours in ‘the Balkans’ into hundreds of thousands of military lives.

Most scholars of peacekeeping in BiH concentrate on the diplomatic and doctrinal structuring of the mission (e.g. Gow 1997; Ripley 1999; Burg and Shoup 2000; Thornton 2000). Some, more recently, have used ethnographic fieldwork or qualitative interviewing to discuss peacekeepers’ on-the-ground experiences (e.g. Kernic 1999; Koedijk 2002; Kretchik 2004; Bos and Soeters 2006; Sion 2008). The presence of a large semi-permanent military force all too often invites an informal economy of smuggling and sexual exploitation that undermines the intervention’s stated aims (Skjelsbaek 2004; Andreas 2008). These angles on the study of peacekeeping expose a common contradiction of using specialized military organizations, personnel and equipment to accomplish change in the civilian environment.

In peacekeeping and peace support operations, forces with an organizational culture which has developed to facilitate high-intensity warfighting must reorient themselves around a strategic goal of peace and consent, not victory. The strategic studies experts Christopher Dandeker and James Gow (1999: 65–67) thus argue that

the international force's experiences in BiH produced a concept of 'strategic peacekeeping': intervening forces secure the theatre of war and cooperate with the many civilian agencies involved while the belligerent parties negotiate and implement a settlement. Extensive contacts between civilian and military cultures are therefore integral to peacekeeping today.

Yet more intercultural encounters are built into military peacekeepers' daily lives through their contacts with their bases' local staff. The feminist International Relations scholar Cynthia Enloe (1990: 2) argues that military bases are 'artificial societies created out of unequal relations between men and women of different races and classes'. Power inequalities between locals and internationals in post-war BiH have certainly troubled several recent anthropologists (e.g. Jansen 2006, Coles 2007, Gilbert 2008). The employment of locals by the international military force creates intercultural encounters not only between 'internationals' and 'locals' but, simultaneously, between civilians and the military. The categories are arguably under most strain when local interpreters travel with the force on core peacekeeping tasks outside the base.<sup>2</sup> This paper, indeed, emerged from a research project into operational language support in BiH, for which the author conducted more than 30 oral history interviews with local and international people who were involved in carrying out or preparing for peacekeeping work.<sup>3</sup> Analysing and coding the data revealed that encounters between and constructions of civilian and military were central to many of the narratives, articulated around four dimensions of difference: uniforms, weapons, disruptiveness and training.

The uniformed body

Uniforms, immediate visible signs of belonging to the military rather than the civilian world, confer the authority of sponsoring state or non-state entities on military people and their actions. Beyond the battlefield function of camouflage, modern industrial militaries' highly-regulated uniforms denote individual bodies as parts of the collective, signal organizational subdivisions to those in the know and mark out 'the military figure as the specialist purveyor of the means of violence' (Giddens 1985: 230). The international law of war protects prisoners if they are wearing uniforms distinguishing them from civilians (Pfanner 2004: 118–20), and US special forces' practice of wearing non-standard uniforms or local civilian clothing in Iraq and Afghanistan prompted a senior Defense Department attorney to reflect on whether violence committed by troops so dressed would be legal (Hays Parks 2003). Uniforms, according to the fashion theorist Jennifer Craik (2003: 130), comprise a set of 'body techniques' inscribing physical and moral discipline, conformity, formality and compulsion. They thus convey not only symbolic demarcations but also embodied expectations.

Many components of the multinational force in BiH issued uniforms to their locally-employed interpreters, blurring the symbolic distinction between international soldier and local civilian. During the war, UNPROFOR troops operated close to or on front lines, exposing all members of liaison parties and patrols to sniper fire. British officers who managed interpreter teams ('military supervisors') would need to arrange uniforms and protective equipment for new hires. Louise, an Army linguist who equipped an interpreter team in 1994, explained that '[t]hey needed military clothing, because they were targets if they didn't look like us' – adding immediately 'they will never look like British Army people, but at least they've got half a chance'. In 1999, four years after Dayton, with civilian employees at far less risk from aggression let

alone snipers, UK forces' local interpreters were still being issued uniforms. Andy, an RAF officer who had been a civil affairs officer in central Bosnia in 1999, distinguished between uniform and equipment when asked about interpreters' kit. They would not have equipment 'because [...] it's not their job to soldier', though they would get a camouflage outfit from the stores 'just to show that in fact they were working on the UK plc side'.

The United Nations Military Observers (UNMOs), who operated in BiH between 1992 and 1995 as an unarmed military organization with members from many UN countries, handled the matter differently. UNMOs had no central store of personal equipment but brought kit from their home armed forces. A former senior UNMO explained the ambiguous result while showing the author a photograph of an UNMO team including local interpreters in civilian clothes: because all UNMOs wore their national uniforms, 'there wasn't a logical uniform for them [local interpreters] to wear, and so they were far less militarized, in some ways.' UNMOs' interpreters also lived in their own homes, not on a base (where interpreters employed by a UK battalion he had previously commanded in BiH had lived). Among the force's national contingents, baseline equipment policies for troops themselves also varied with force protection philosophies. Under IFOR/SFOR, approaches ranged from a light-touch British policy drawn from Northern Ireland counter-insurgency (berets not helmets; no body armour) to a rigid US approach of full protective gear which left US soldiers treated with suspicion and distance by locals (Kretchik 2004: 34).<sup>4</sup>

When local interpreters wore uniform, the civilian/military distinction became refocused on to smaller details. British soldiers' combat jackets had inch-long UK flags sewn on to the upper left arm. 'I don't think it would have been appropriate,' Louise replied when asked whether local interpreters wore the flag patches too. She

went on to explain that '[w]ith the best will in the world, those interpreters were never going to look like soldiers': their jackets were undone, their trousers untucked, their boots not 'properly' laced and their hair loose (conceiving of the archetypal interpreter as a long-haired woman). Although supplementing one's kit with non-standard items is perfectly ordinary in military life, the local civilians' customizations seemed to transgress an accepted degree of individualization: their alterations had no functional justification, and indeed compromised what was understood to be the uniform's primary function. The final distinction of appearance between soldiers and interpreters – 'the other obvious giveaway', as Louise put it – exceeded the symbolic and encompassed the means to do physical harm: 'they didn't carry weapons, of course [...] I always had a sidearm while I was up country, we didn't need them in [the UK brigade headquarters in] Split.'

The legitimized possession of a firearm was the fundamental separator between the military and its civilian employees. It presupposed an individual – a body – having received the training and internalized the discipline to use the weapon in a controlled and orderly way. Civilians might often have had possession of guns in demobilized, post-conflict BiH, but did not have the training, the right or the power to use force. Conversely, the military subjectivity saw armed civilians as disordered sources of risk that needed bringing under control, as rehearsed in pre-deployment role-play exercises where soldiers used interpreters to tell native 'Serbo-Croat' speakers to drop their weapons. Being accompanied by indispensable civilians who should not, would not and did not have guns limited soldiers' freedom of action. Fred, an extremely experienced Army language instructor who had done military interpreting in BiH before overseeing 'Serbo-Croat' language training in the UK, explained the drawbacks of local interpreters even while praising their work. By using a military

person with language knowledge, ‘you had an armed person who could look after himself or herself’, whereas ‘a young female Bosnian interpreter, or even a young male Bosnian interpreter’ was ‘someone else to look after’. The value of an extra armed person had to be weighed against the advantages of travelling with native speakers of the local language and the disadvantages of having to protect them in the unstable front-line territory of wartime central Bosnia.

### The armed body

Narrating civilian/military intercultural encounters required interview participants to experience, remember, reconcile and justify the power differentials in which they and their interlocutors had been embedded. The force’s local employees (known to NATO as ‘locally-employed civilians’, although a local gaze might construct them as ‘internationally-employed civilians’) enjoyed certain privileges of protection relative to other local civilians, not least the right to be evacuated if the troops had to withdraw. If they were imprisoned, a powerful (though not all-powerful) organization would be interested in their whereabouts. Some interpreters injured at work obtained access to medical treatment abroad through their military employers. In April 1999, when UK forces in Republika Srpska (the Serb-controlled entity of post-Dayton BiH) anticipated riots against the NATO bombings of Serbia and Montenegro, troops in outlying towns temporarily withdrew to the Banja Luka main base. They took their local interpreters along – although one of these interpreters complained that their military supervisor had not bothered to arrange them accommodation there. The evacuation privilege set local workers apart from their own friends, neighbours and families. At Srebrenica, a Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) interpreter who worked for the



UNMOs, Hasan Nuhanović, could not get his brother and parents added to a list of local people entitled to leave with the Dutch UN battalion in July 1995 (Koedijk 4.4.31.1). His family were killed by the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS), while Nuhanović survived to campaign for justice for the victims of the massacre.

Local employees were elevated above fellow citizens through these privileges but still experienced a power inequality relative to international soldiers. This inequality resembled the double asymmetry of their economic position, where they would earn much more than a local company or state institution would pay but would still receive less than the going rate in the force's home country. However, not even the soldiers had limitless physical power. Their own power was regulated by rules of engagement (ROE) and relativized situationally: body armour and a sidearm would have different values depending on whether one was on street patrol talking to civilians, outnumbered by local soldiers at a checkpoint or coming under artillery fire.

Certain missions or career tracks also complicated the military ideal of weapons proficiency. After BiH, Louise had subsequently gone on a humanitarian mission to Rwanda with a parachute field ambulance. She remembered anxieties about the Army doctors, whose Sandhurst training had been 'a four-week course to [...] do a bit of marching, a bit of polish on boots, and how to put a uniform on'. They therefore had not 'done quite as much weapon training' as other army officers, although 'my fears were totally unfounded, they were the most professional soldiers ever'. The UN's decision not to arm UNMOs made them even more ambiguous. The senior UNMO quoted above compared himself to the local civilian staff – 'We were as unarmed as the interpreters' – as he explained the UNMOs' parameters: they could only threaten to withhold UN resources such as aid convoys, ambulances or helicopters and could not compel action through direct physical force or even direct financial inducements.

At the same time, he believed unarmed military observers had been preferable to a US proposal for a post-Dayton armed observer organization. The weapon had not been essential to the task ('striding around with a pistol on your hip doesn't make you a more effective liaison officer'), as central as it was to a fundamental understanding of the trained military body.

The UN mandate and UNPROFOR's ROE had even more problematic effects on soldiers' perceptions of their capacity to fulfil their professional and military identities. One Danish conscript, a volunteer for UNPROFOR in Croatia, felt that the UN's need for transparency had threatened the troops' ability to do their job, telling the author: 'When you are a UN soldier [...] you are actually not working almost like a soldier, because when you are on these [observation] posts you always have to be so visible.' He considered that his comrades would not actually have exercised the ROE permissions to use force. Groups of soldiers who saw themselves as their military's elite may have had particular difficulties adapting to peacekeeping missions. Donna Winslow (2004: 9) thus identifies the Canadian Airborne Regiment's sense of superiority to other troops as a contributing factor in mistreatment of Somali prisoners, and the Dutch report into the Srebrenica massacre similarly suggested that the rebereted Airmobile Brigade's elite identity produced intolerance towards outsiders and an inability to see locals as individuals (Frankfort 2002: 2.8.4.1). When the UN passed the military mission in BiH to NATO after Dayton, the NATO force was empowered to implement Dayton by force if necessary but did not meet anticipated resistance levels. Perhaps paradoxically, non-elite Austrian soldiers who had volunteered for an IFOR transport unit then felt disappointed because they had expected being able to fight (unlike traditional UN peacekeeping) and were left to

cope in a peace-building situation that ‘challenged the soldiers’ self-esteem as warriors’ (Kernic 1999: 122–23).

The restrictions imposed during the war by the UNPROFOR mandate left many peacekeepers – for instance, British witnesses to the Bosniak–Croat conflict – feeling stripped of their power to confront local armed forces and save civilian lives. The mandate’s focus on safeguarding aid convoys not humans, and the difficulties of obtaining air-strikes, both interfered with the belief that innocent civilians required protection and that it was the soldier’s task to provide it. In April 1993, the first British battalion in BiH dealt with the aftermath of the massacre at Ahmići, where Bosnian Croat paramilitaries had murdered a village of Bosniaks by throwing grenades and petrol bombs into the villagers’ own homes. The clear-up operation has been remembered in the UK as the epitome of senseless violence in BiH and a particularly traumatic incident for British troops (see, e.g., Kosminsky 1999; Woolley 2004). Chris, another of the small cadre of British military interpreters, had spent some time helping this battalion establish itself in BiH but had left before April. When asked what he thought the most dangerous time for British forces in BiH had been, he wanted to emphasize that ‘each battalion, each soldier will have his own story’ but added that Ahmići:

must have been one of those worst times for our soldiers, simply because they had to deal with the results of... the massacre of women and children. [...] We all saw soldiers that had lost their lives. But when you see innocent civilians, especially children, I think, that’s... yeah.

Here, as in so many historical, fictional and visual accounts of war, women and children are innocent symbolic non-combatants, deserving military protection, supposed to remain outside the sphere of conflict and killing. These civilians' death and suffering belonged to a different emotional plane from a soldier's death, reflecting a normative but long-outdated ideal of conventional warfare between military forces that sat uncomfortably against the irregular warfare of the post-Yugoslav conflicts. Even when peacekeeping missions frustrated soldierly identities on a macro-level, military personnel tended to narrate their service in BiH in terms of micro-level changes they had brought to local people, families, schools, hospitals and towns. They preserved a distinction between their own domain of action and the domain they acted upon. Importantly for the resolutions of their personal narratives, they located reasons for satisfaction and success even when the macro-level strategic objective of keeping the peace or 'normalizing' BiH invited disappointment or hopelessness. A tidy separation between the civilian and military worlds was, however, impossible to achieve when military teams were assisted practically but disrupted symbolically by local civilian interpreters.

### The disruptive body

Many peacekeeping tasks required interaction with the local population, especially negotiating with local military and civilian power-holders, conducting inspections or delivering aid and resources through the civil affairs structure. Certain other language-dependent tasks that would have fallen to the military in a classic liberation and occupation paradigm, such as investigating and interrogating war crimes suspects, instead belonged to international civilian organizations and agencies (the military

contributed nothing more than security and logistics). Every component of the force nonetheless had some language support needs and dependence on local civilians. Of all the local staff, the distinction between military and civilian was at its most porous where interpreters were concerned. Cleaners, labourers, mechanics, laundresses and kitchen hands remained on the bounded space of the base performing various support functions. Interpreters, however, were untrained persons – undisciplined bodies – of a different nationality who were supposed to be on the soldiers’ side during military tasks in a foreign, potentially hostile, environment beyond the gates. The disruption went well beyond the level of appearance involved in the ambiguities of uniform.

Local interpreters were indispensable to communication but also restricted the soldiers’ actions, mobility and speech. Informal conversations between soldiers (managing the boredom of much peacekeeping and travel) were self-censored in interpreters’ presence since locals could not be trusted not to pass on sensitive or tactical information. The very process of communicating through an interpreter, breaking up and simplifying one’s habitual speech-patterns to give the interpreter time to speak, could itself be wearing over a peacekeeping tour (Barry 2008: 282). Pre-deployment training emphasized that, in dangerous situations, soldiers should look after interpreters before themselves. Nikola, a British bomb disposal officer, exemplified the tension around the interpreter’s status when he explained this part of his own training: treating local staff was ‘like treating another fellow soldier’ but imposed limitations because ‘they are unarmed’ and might lack a soldier’s ‘degree of training and situational awareness’.

Physical hardship exposed further differences between soldiers and civilian interpreters. Resilience to discomfort is an inalienable aspect of the military subjectivity: initial military training accustoms the body to strenuous physical activity,

sleep deprivation and improvised outdoor living, both as a stimulus to primary group bonding and as preparation for experiencing such conditions on operations.

Interpreters, being civilians, were not expected to meet the same resilience standards – although those who worked during the war and lived in (e.g.) besieged Sarajevo, Goražde or Srebrenica were in fact experiencing greater physical danger and shortages at home than the peacekeepers on the base. Soldiers' treatment of the interpreters varied between chivalry and disregard. Some, including the more involved military supervisors, attempted to arrange better living conditions for their employees than themselves. When Louise's base was without showers for a week, for instance, she was content to improvise for herself – 'that's army life, you know, you get used to that' – but obtained transport to drive her team of interpreters to showers at another British base.

Interpreters in teams simultaneously made their own judgements about resilience. Edin, who had still been in his late teens when he worked for a civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) team, explained that he and a male colleague had volunteered for longer assignments to spare their female colleagues:

Well, I can tell you this. In CIMIC, in the period from '96 to 2000, there were four of us. Two guys and two girls. Two male and two female. So, mostly it was my male colleague and myself that were travelling, going out in the fields. Travelling a lot. You know, trying to keep our two female colleagues in the offices, because of course... I'm not being sexist, it's really sometimes hard for a girl to go out in a field for a couple of days or several days. So, from talking to my male colleague, he didn't mind also travelling a lot, because he also enjoyed it.

Q: So why was it harder for a girl to do that?

A: Well, if you don't have toilets, you know, loos, as you Brits would say, sometimes if you had to spend a night away from your home, at that time hotels or motels were in, you know, really bad shape. I remember sleeping in a sleeping bag out in a field, literally on the field. Even, we wouldn't even have a tent at that time. So of course that's harder on a girl than on a guy. Just normal stuff.

Sinan, who worked for British infantry companies at Goražde during the war and later became an interpreter for international police missions, narrated an idea of a 'real' interpreter having gone through wartime hardship (suggesting an emerging generation gap in post-war BiH society). His wartime job often involved ten-day visits to isolated observation posts where he and the British soldiers would be sleeping in troop shelters with no doors, showering in freezing conditions by pouring snowmelt from a jerry-can over each other's bodies, and taking cover from enemy fire (Sinan's team, like Edin's, usually excused females these remote visits). While describing the OPs, he interjected:

If I wanted to take a shower I had to take, I was just telling my colleagues the other day, that... as, I'm only 34 and I'm one of the most experienced in the EUPM [European Union Police Mission] where I'm working now. I was telling that they don't know half of it. They don't know what an interpreter really is without spending ten days on an OP.

Local interpreters' endurance was not to be underestimated. They nonetheless lacked the instinctive bodily responses soldiers obtained through training; even men who had done military service or joined local armed forces during the war had not undergone the same training regime as their employers. In interviews with British military interpreters, the civilians' lack of hardiness and their lack of military training were seen as going hand-in-hand and leaving residual needs for language-trained military personnel. Chris explained that taking local interpreters into certain situations was impractical, unsafe and inappropriate: they needed to have had Nuclear–Biological–Chemical training before certain arms control inspections ('obviously you can't just walk into a chemical area'), and if a unit was under attack 'you cannot necessarily have the girl with the flowery hair [...] or the boy with the beautiful hairstyle [...] who's never seen any of that kind of stuff before'.

The military person was distinguished by his or her readiness, resistance to exertion, proficiency with weapons and ability to look after oneself and others (Chris and his colleague Fred discussed local and military interpreters in similar terms). In certain other contexts, having to be responsible for people without these attributes in danger zones could produce resentment. Tony, a British artillery officer stationed near Prijedor in 1996, resented that on an unpredictable election day he had been asked to guard an inter-entity crossing point as security for civilian election monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe:<sup>5</sup> 'they were just civilians who had volunteered, through philanthropy, really, to go and do this', 'they had no military training' and they caused more problems than they solved. Yet interpreters were largely excused from the category of unnecessary civilian because they were seen as essential for carrying out the soldiers' mission (unlike the election monitors, who



might have been important to the broader political process in BiH but had little to contribute to what Tony understood as his part in the immediate mission in Prijedor). Their disruption to the framework of military and civilian cultures could be rationalized by treating interpreters as communicative tools or could be managed through a professionalization process that aimed to instil a military-compatible subjectivity.

### The trained body

For soldiers and local civilian interpreters to work effectively together, both parties needed training. Whereas soldiers needed to be initiated into their responsibilities towards civilians, interpreters needed to internalize responsibility towards fulfilling the soldiers' mission by interpreting accurately. Intensive and structured training based around classroom learning and role-plays was not affordable or feasible, since the interpreters were needed immediately and in the immediate locality. The interpreters' long working hours and constant presence in military bases and vehicles provided some compensatory socialization but little opportunity to improve their interpreting skills, except when their military supervisors were themselves linguists who passed on some of their own knowledge.

Chris, who had played a key role in recruiting local interpreters, had taken on the position of 'chief interpreter' and imparted a sense of professionalism to his young employees. This included the technique of speaking in the first person speech (rather than reported speech) and avoided 'drawing attention to yourself'. Untrained interpreters could upstage someone 'very easily' and interpreters who were young, attractive, 'have long flowing hair, and [...] wear lipstick' could distract listeners

from the 'old grumpy colonel' beside them by flicking their hair and softening his speech. Chris acknowledged that male as well as female interpreters could go 'out of control [...] doing their own little stage act' ('there was one chap I remember called Elvis, but never mind'). The image of the attractive, distracting feminine interpreter does however recur in soldiers' narratives and memoirs. Ben Barry (2008: 71), who commanded a British light infantry battalion in BiH in 1995–96, wrote: 'The women could not resist doing everything they could to make themselves as attractive as possible. We would often see them arrive for work having devoted hours to their hair and elaborate make-up.'

Chris had also apostrophized the interpreter who could not be expected to cope on a battlefield as 'the girl with the flowery hair or the boy with the beautiful hairstyle'. The construction suggested that interpreters' non-functional concern with personal appearance confounded the military subjectivity, but also complicated the archetypal gender structure of masculinity in combat and femininity supporting male warriors (see Elshtain 1985). Claire Duncanson (2009: 70) has argued that, during the British experience in BiH, an incipient 'peacekeeping masculinity' emerged that connected soldiering to 'traditionally feminine' practices of relationship-building and conversation yet did not completely displace hegemonic warfighting masculinity. By making sense of their own distinctiveness from scruffy aid workers, hypocritical politicians or 'Balkan soldiers' (Duncanson 2009: 72) – or, one might add, local interpreters – military men strove to accommodate peacekeeping within their sense of self, that is, their ideas of what it meant to be a soldier.

Not only could the same constructions of flightiness and levity be ascribed to female and male interpreters alike, but female soldiers (at least in the UK narratives discussed here) enjoyed a certain unmarkedness: Louise, for instance, spoke matter-

of-factly about how ROE in Rwanda affected her own capacity to use weapons. Where the limits of gender-free professionalism manifested themselves were the military body's biological needs and desires. When Louise had first arrived at the factory being turned into the British base, she and a few other female soldiers had slept in a curtained-off area of the factory floor. The mobile shower unit, when it arrived, was available to women and men at different times, and even then had to be monitored so that male operators did not 'peek through and have a look at the girls.' Male soldiers were all too likely to seek sexual relations with local female staff, a practice that Louise, as the interpreters' supervisor, worked to stop.

Chris and other officers in similar roles narrate that in practice local interpreters became accustomed to working with their military employers and conveying messages in a proper, orderly manner. Two factors assisted this acclimatization as the wartime conditions blended into a gradually stabilizing situation of negotiation mixed with localized civil disorder. The risks and hardship shared between soldiers and interpreters led to emotional responses that ranged from camaraderie, to identification with the international troops, to sexual relationships and marriage. Meanwhile, the generally improving security situation saw a decline of the combat subjectivity and the spread of a managerial, office-job approach to the mission in BiH (albeit with fear that civil unrest or broken-down negotiations could see violence resume). The most likely obstacle to these familiarization processes was the routinization of military supervision amid a tendency to view interpreters as tools not comrades. Andy explained that soldiers and interpreters had not socialized at all at the base where he worked in 1999: the interpreter was 'a tool [...] not your best buddy, he's not somebody you grew up with', whereas groups of soldiers were 'slightly more homogenous' and had 'been together for a long time'.

This was quite unlike the picture of social relations between soldiers and interpreters at British bases in Vitez and Tuzla during the war, where interpreters had had access to the officers' mess and accompanied off-duty soldiers (or vice versa) to social events in town. The transformation made for a more managerial and office-like environment, but risked being over-extended into impersonal interpersonal relationships with local employees themselves. One woman who worked on a small British base in the RS in the late 1990s spoke of her resentment at hearing soldiers being briefed not to forget their helmets, body armour, satellite phones and interpreters – 'And we were like, as if I am [a] tool, sorry, excuse me?'

An alternative means of accommodating local employees within a military environment was to enable them to develop a professional interpreter's subjectivity within a system of supervision under international civilian linguists. In 2000, Edin's office was amalgamated into a new structure for language services at the SFOR headquarters. He remembered it as a positive experience because 'we were all civilians' and, in particular, because the structure had calmed down the working day: soldiers could no longer walk straight into their office with competing tasks, because a front desk officer now mediated between them and the interpreters. Adapting to the discipline of being a civilian on a military base was – interpreters who had thrived at the headquarters organization believed – the trade-off for being able to work in what they considered the most professional of the many international organizations that hired local language staff. Others weighed the heavily regulated workplace environment against their friendships with local colleagues and the high rates of pay that might enable them to support their family, rebuild property destroyed during the war or pursue higher education abroad. Constructions of civilian and military had

their material consequences when they played into employees' decisions to join, stay in or leave the alien but rewarding environment of BiH's transient new garrisons.

## Conclusion

A lasting sign of local civilians' familiarity, if not comfort, with the military environment of the base was their adaptation to military vocabulary. The demands of coming to terms with unfamiliar acronyms, equipment and jargon made experienced employees ever more effective and valuable. Through day-to-day life with soldiers, they often acquired military or regional slang which they continued to use in English during their interviews in 2009: one man spoke of soldiers entering the tea-room 'for a drink, for a brew' and one woman described herself as 'guttled' when her primary school had not let children choose which foreign language to learn. Another woman had been a professional translator before the war and ended up working as a media analyst for the French force in command of UNPROFOR Sector Sarajevo. The next time she visited France, she remembered, her French friends had jokingly remarked that she had started to talk 'like a Légionnaire, like a military' because the soldiers' vocabulary had influenced what had been her 'intellectual, academically-educated French.' In a mirror image of this process, international soldiers who received military language training found that their own skills in the local language were limited outside a military context. Louise recalled: 'I can remember phrases like *mirovni pregovori*, peace talks, *etničko čišćenje*, ethnic cleansing. I couldn't order a pound of bananas. Don't have the vocabulary. We didn't learn that.' For both groups,

international and local, their language skills were shaped by the tasks they prepared for and their experiences whilst working towards military objectives.

Contemporary military operations impose various civilian/military encounters upon deployed armed forces, especially on units involved in humanitarian aid. Based on interviews with international soldiers and relief workers in BiH and Haiti, Laura Miller (1999) concluded that NGO employees who had come to appreciate military security and logistics capability tended to believe that the military should actually take a greater role in humanitarian work such as demining. Their opposition to the military's primary warfighting role was still a constant source of tension, although Miller argued that this gave relief organizations an important function as a check on peacekeepers' behaviour in the absence of any more regularized oversight.

Embedded journalists are closer still to the interpreters paradigm because they, unlike aid workers and like local interpreters, are present in daily military life inside and outside camp. During the war in Iraq, the practice of embedded journalism risked turning reporters into propagandists but also enabled bottom-up accounts of tactical failures and friendly fire incidents drawing on troops on the ground rather than press spokespeople (Kellner 2004). It also tended to produce 'enculturation' as journalists built up trust with soldiers over a short but intense period and became likely to internalize the unit's values (Pfau et al. 2004: 76–78): thus, for instance, Ronald Paul Larson (2004), a journalist from Wisconsin who was embedded with the US Army's 36th Engineer Group as it advanced towards Baghdad in 2003, wrote that sharing moments of physical hardship and the threat of attack did the most to build up his bond with the soldiers – not unlike the soldiers–interpreters relationships in Vitez.

Journalists, however, embed themselves with military units to achieve a divergent goal and on behalf of a separate organization. Local interpreters are normatively

working to achieve the same goals as the military, and they also differ from the embedded journalists' example because the journalist will typically embed with a unit from the same country and is able to presume some cultural familiarity. For soldiers to accommodate the local interpreters' presence was a far more mundane challenge than for them to come to terms with the threats to their identity as a soldier than a peacekeeping mission could pose, but both phenomena forced them to make sense of what it meant to belong or not to belong to the military or civilian world. Although parties on both sides of the relationship found everyday ways to resolve the disruption and contradiction, the ultimate means of distinction remained the embodied subjectivity of the military profession.

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<sup>1</sup> English, unlike some other languages, has no convenient noun for military people who could belong to any branch of the armed forces. Most military personnel in peacekeeping came from land forces, hence the use of 'soldier', although smaller numbers from naval, amphibious and air forces also participated.

<sup>2</sup> The linguistic professions distinguish translators (workers with written language) from interpreters (spoken language). However, participants on both sides of the peacekeeping relationship generally use 'interpreter' even when roles involved some translation. The author has chosen to follow their usage rather than imposing unfamiliar labels.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with Britons and Danes were in English. Bosnian participants could choose to participate in English (chosen by all participants mentioned here) or their own language. Some participants asked us to use particular pseudonyms; otherwise, the author followed Penny Summerfield's practice (Summerfield 1998: 26) for interpretative oral history and chose to use pseudonyms for others.

<sup>4</sup> Rod Thornton (2004: 86–88) argues that the British 'minimum force' philosophy dates back to mid-nineteenth-century imperial policing practices based on Victorian common law, evangelical Protestantism and behavioural norms for officers. Most accounts overlook this longer-term history and primarily relate it to counter-insurgency in Northern Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> See Kimberley Coles's critical ethnography (2007) of OSCE election supervision and the 'democratization' process (Coles 2007).