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Politics of Impasse: Specters of Socialism and the Struggles for the Future in  
Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina

By

Larisa Kurtovic

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in the

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of the

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Committee in Charge

Professor Alexei Yurchak, Chair

Professor Charles K. Hirschkind

Professor Xin Liu

Professor Michael J. Watts

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Politics of Impasse: Specters of Socialism and the Struggles for the Future in  
Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina

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## Abstract

### Politics of Impasse: Specters of Socialism and the Struggles for the Future in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina

By

Larisa Kurtovic

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Alexei Yurchak, Chair

This dissertation is an ethnography of contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina that examines the central conundrum of the country's postwar life: the seeming contradiction between the high levels of political dissatisfaction among its citizens and the absence, perhaps even the impossibility, of a mass mobilization that could usher in meaningful change. Through an anthropological investigation of everyday politics, community dynamics and grassroots activism, this thesis look at how the terms of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which stopped the war but deferred crucial political questions, created a political impasse while turning the future into an urgent political problem.

This impasse, marked by contradictory hopes of a great violent transformation and what has come to be known as the “problem of political apathy,” produces unique configurations of the political field to which this dissertation is dedicated. In order to understand how a flowering of unconventional political interventions becomes possible alongside a systematic disengagement from political affairs, one must attend not only to the structural conditions that have produced this sense of suspension, but also consider the effect of *thick histories* on the political imagination and contemporary dispositions and sensibilities. The bloody Bosnian war, which took place between 1992-1995 within a decade-long dismantling of Yugoslavia, has undoubtedly left a dramatic impact on collective consciousness. But so have too the often-sidelined decades of socialism, which helped shape norms and attitudes about the place of politics in public life.

This dissertation gives attention to the intersections of the postwar projects of social reengineering, and the forms of political action and thinking inherited from socialism. It argues that political subjectivity cannot be understood except in specific historic and socio-cultural coordinates, and demonstrates that certain kinds of orientations that are often seen as “apathetic”, “illiberal” and “pathological” are in fact ethical, active and responsible. The skepticism with which many Bosnians approach political participation today is the product of acute awareness of limits of transformative capacity of all political action.

Politics of Impasse is based on over two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital, as well as the town of Jajce, the famed birthplace of socialist Yugoslavia, and finally, the regional center of Banja Luka.

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## INTRODUCTION: SPECTERS OF A REVOLUTION PAST

*Only four million people have the fortune to live in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Others do not have this fortune, but they have everything else.*

(Unknown Bosnian graffiti author)

In the spring of 2009, against the backdrop of what was deemed “the biggest political crisis after the end of the war,” Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia-Herzegovina, seemed to be bracing for a dramatic new wave of mass demonstrations. Following a series of unexpected protests during the previous year, analysts, activists and some citizens hoped that the impact of the economic crisis combined with the growing anger with government officials would lead to a type of a large-scale revolt considered necessary to produce measurable change. During this time of anticipation, everyday discussions on the streets, in the media and on online forums abounded with terms such as “breakdown” [*sлом*], “citizen rebellion” [*građanski bunt*], “collapse” [*kolaps, krah*], “coup” [*puč*], and plethora of others signifying the eminence of a sudden, all-pervasive and likely violent social turnover. Everywhere I went, housewives, cab drivers and friends were telling me that the “crisis” had reached its pinnacle, and that the political situation had become unsustainable. “This is all about to blow up,” I seemed to hear everywhere.

As the rhetoric on the inevitable implosion of the spasm that has characterized the postwar period proliferated, countless online discussions and Facebook groups were created, inviting citizens to “wake up” and take the future of their country into their own hands. Constant reports in the media about rampant incompetence and irresponsibility of government officials, who were failing to protect citizens in the most basic of ways, intensified the feeling that the postwar political decadency had reached its limits. Some groups, and especially those attractive to younger Bosnians, at times used the loaded term “revolution”<sup>1</sup> in order to conjure up images of rallying masses coming into being as world-transforming agents. But despite their fragmentation and the use of different rhetoric, these disarrayed groups of dreamers shared something in common: no one seemed to have a ready plan for or a set vision of a political program that would follow such demonstrations. The “revolution” seemed to be a trope packed with powerful yet disarticulated, at times incoherent and contradictory, desires.

Despite the critical voices questioning these lofty and abstract rhetorical claims, a series of events that took place in early 2009 suggested this talk of transformation had some material basis. In January, inspired by the protest act of the Iraqi journalist, several activist groups organized a symbolic shoe-throwing action, allowing citizens the opportunity to express their discontent against the cardboard cutouts of politicians in power—a plan met with (too) much enthusiasm by the irate crowd. A citizen campaign to oust and bring to court the corrupt and

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<sup>1</sup> In his philosophical reflections on nature of history and time, Reinhart Koselleck (2002) argues that the temporalization of political language since the Age of the Enlightenment has been central to the emergence of a modern historical consciousness. During this period, many terms that marked existing phenomena and institutions, became temporalized in a new way. One such term was revolution, a word Koselleck claims became a central part of political vocabulary only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the word came to signify a dramatic, sudden transformation, and became linked with new kinds of political hopes. By contrast, its original meaning from Latin term “revolvere” (to revolve) described the continuous circling of planets around the sun. What one might mean by revolution changes across space and time. In postwar and postsocialist Bosnia, the term revolution invokes the memory of socialism, while reminding that such an event and vehicle of political transformation has actually never taken place in the country’s political history. Most political entities of which Bosnia was part actually emerged through wars, rather than popular uprisings. Even the socialist revolution purportedly took place during the WWII People’s Liberation Struggle. To accent this problematic nature of the term, and to make the reader aware of its haunting quality and conceptual elusiveness, this term appears in this introduction under quotation marks.

incompetent Prime Minister of the Federation, Nedžad Branković, as well as smaller mobilizations of certain interest groups including war veterans, worker unions and people with disabilities (all of whom emerged as formidable political actors in a series of scandalous encounters with parliamentarians and officers of the law), made the possibility of something larger happening more imaginable.

In conversations with my ethnographic interlocutors, seasoned and recently mobilized activists, there was much speculation over the proper “date” to stage one such event. Due to their socialist-era symbolism, April 6, the Day of Liberation of Sarajevo, as well as May 9, the Day of Victory against Fascism, were identified as the primary candidates. Although I thought it was strange not one among the organizations whose activities I was researching seemed to actually be planning and preparing for such protests, I too succumbed to the wave of anticipation, even planning out my fastest route of return to Sarajevo from Jajce, a town where I was doing ethnographic research that spring, so that I (the anthropologist) would not miss “the revolution.” And then, that fateful Saturday, May 9, the day of truth came—and aside from the members of the Tito Memorial Society laying down flower wreaths next to a few socialist era monuments—nothing, absolutely nothing happened.

This stillborn spring of uprisings did not simply represent a failure of the political resolve or a sign of incompetence of Bosnian “civil society.” Rather, it brought to the surface the central conundrum of Bosnia’s postwar political life: despite overwhelming, palpable dissatisfaction, and singular moments of interruption, the political situation in the county has remained unchanged, dominated by nationalist parties, and marked by the absence, and increasingly also unimaginability, of an organized popular effort toward change. This impasse, marked by contradictory hopes of a great violent transformation and what has come to be known as the “problem of political apathy,” produces unique configurations of the political field to which this dissertation is dedicated. In order to understand how commonplace invocations of a “revolution” become possible alongside a systematic disengagement from political affairs, one must attend not only to the structural conditions that have produced this impasse, but also consider the effect of *thick histories* on the political imagination and contemporary dispositions and sensibilities. The bloody Bosnian war, which took place between 1992-1995 within a decade-long dismantling of Yugoslavia, has undoubtedly left a dramatic impact on collective consciousness. But so have too the often-sidelined decades of socialism, which helped shape norms and attitudes about the place of politics in public life.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation makes the case that this enduring dream of a “revolution,” which is simultaneously an echo of a broken socialist utopia and the devastating pitfalls of post-1990 democratization, reflects a profound and widely shared skepticism about transformative capacity of all political action. The deployment of the trope of the “revolution” testifies not of the immanence of such a profound transformation, but rather its felt impossibility. Bosnian citizens experience the gridlock created by the war and the terms of the peace accords as immutable and on some level unchangeable. This does not mean, however, that political life has become nothing but a series of acts of disengagement—to the contrary, the impasse teems with a great variety of opinions and interventions. But even such forms of political engagement remain characterized

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<sup>2</sup> As will soon become apparent, this dissertation does not shy away from thinking about the effects of the 1992-1995 war. The thickness of times owes much to the memories of this recent cataclysm and the losses suffered and endured. The war is a constitutive part of contemporary consciousness and the one thing that the world associates with Bosnia. Hence, there is no need to fetishize it. My intent is rather to show how the tragedy of the war has been compounded by the violent transformation of this previous world, and the loss of the possibilities contained within the political, social and economic project that helped bring it into being.

by cautiousness, reluctance, sometimes embarrassment and most often anticipation of failure. Bosnian activists among whom I conducted my research equated their efforts with the “run on windmills,” a part tragic and part comic effort to transform a world not amenable to change. How then, under what circumstances and to what end, do Bosnians act politically in what seems like a wholly overdetermined, paralyzed situation?

*Politics of Impasse* traces the forms of political thought and action emerging in postwar Bosnia amidst ongoing enclosures of ethnic nationalism and urgent demands for change. It demonstrates that the war and the unfinished nature of the Dayton Accords—the internationally monitored agreement that ended the violence but deferred crucial political questions—created a political deadlock at the same time as it established the national future as an urgent political problem. While nationalist elites stall much needed reforms, attempting to capitalize on memory of violence, citizens are mobilizing around everyday social issues as a way of making the future more livable. Today, fears about the uncertainties of the future fuel protests over dissolution of the juvenile justice system, local development projects that seek to bring together divided communities and debates over proper forms of pedagogy in kindergartens.

Regardless of their content, these insistent demands for a different future do not simply indicate the continued presence of anxieties about the resumption of armed conflict, but speak rather of the betrayed desires to reconstruct “normal life.”<sup>3</sup> They draw upon the new vocabularies made available by the process of postwar “democratization” but also upon socialist era imaginaries and moral repertoires. This dissertation gives attention to the intersections of these new projects of political reengineering and the genres of action and thinking inherited from socialism. It argues that political subjectivity cannot be understood except in specific historic and socio-cultural coordinates, and that certain kinds of political orientations that are often seen as “apathetic”, “illiberal” and “pathological” are in fact ethical, active and responsible.

### *Bosnia, between Postwar Reconstruction and Postsocialist Transformation*

In 1989, multinational Yugoslavia, with its “soft-style” socialism and relative openness to Western influences, seemed in the best position to make a smooth transition to market capitalism and liberal democracy (Woodward 1995a). Instead, that Yugoslavia, and particularly its central republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, became the most violent and tragic case of socialism’s end. After the US brokered Dayton Peace Accords ended the Bosnian war in 1995, the newly independent country attracted a massive international effort aimed toward rebuilding and reform (see Campbell 1999; Coles 2007; Gilbert 2008; Pickering 2007). Fifteen years later, this postwar reconstruction leaves behind mixed results, emerging out of attempts to create a democratic state by accommodating exclusionary nationalistic interests. In Bosnia today, in the aftermath of multiple failed political enterprises, including the socialist revolution, nation-building and democratic transition, anxieties about collective futures and the survival of the fragile and fragmented state, have reached a sense of urgency.

Despite this new sense of alarm, the disordering of temporal categories has in fact been a fixture of life and politics in postwar Bosnia for a long time. While the 2009 national “crisis” materialized in the broader context of the collapse of the financial markets in the West, the lives of most Bosnians had for decades been structured by various kinds of upheavals, including most

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of “normal life” exemplifies a particularly postsocialist horizon of expectation, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter Three



dramatically the war that followed the breakdown of socialist Yugoslavia. In dismissing the statements of politicians who blamed the current difficult situation on the approaching global crisis, one of my informants proclaimed: “What (global) crisis? What are they talking about? We’ve been in crisis for twenty years!” Others decried the loss of a stolen future, a category that once had special philosophical and political salience in a socialist country dedicated to the bright path towards progress and modernization (Buck-Morss 2002).

Indeed, most of my informants felt that even after thirteen years of reconstruction and postwar rebuilding, their lives had not returned to a pre-war normal. This discordance between expectations and experience was most prominent among the middle-aged generations, which had grown used to the entitlements offered by a relatively comfortable, soft-style socialism created by the Yugoslav leader, Marshal Tito. His communist leadership, in its efforts to differentiate the federation of South Slavs from the other socialist states under the auspices of the Soviets, sought to bolster its legitimacy by fulfilling the promise of progress and a better life for the masses. At the end of WWII, the young government faced the task of rebuilding and industrializing a developing country devastated by war—a project they took on quite successfully with the help of foreign aid, new ideology of valuation of work, volunteer worker brigades, and the quieting of political opposition. The generations born after 1945 came to enjoy increased prosperity, ability to travel and acquire various consumer goods, which made Yugoslav socialist experience unique in the broader Eastern European context. The future, if not quite bright and glorious as was promised by the socialist ideology, at least did not seem to be in crisis. However, after the death of Tito in 1980, the ensuing decade of political and social liberalization simultaneously generated both anxieties and excitement about the newly transformed, open nature of the future. While the 1980s became a decade of tremendous creativity and experimentation, they were characterized by the rise of nationalists, economic insecurity and disagreements about the future of the federal state, all of which gradually led to the war.<sup>4</sup>

The war’s arrival took the great majority of Bosnians by surprise, completely challenging much of what they knew about themselves, their county, neighbors and friends. Along with the displacement of the half of the country’s population, virtually all residents of Bosnia were quite literally jolted out of their lives’ trajectories, becoming displaced in time. In addition to lost lives, the houses which people spent their lives working to build and furnish were gone overnight, the state owned firms where they worked for decades went into hibernation (sometimes never to come out of it), the infrastructure which was once built as proof of Yugoslav commitment to progress was destroyed, and as in case of Sarajevo and other cities and towns under siege, the residents were left without basic elements of modern life, like running water and electricity. During the siege, Sarajevans lamented they had retracted back to the stone age, in a kind of pseudoregression in which strange scenarios such chopping down of one’s modern furniture to make a meal on an open fire outside, became not only possible but ubiquitous.<sup>5</sup> While many referred to this period as “lost years,” some of my informants wondered whether the trauma of war had permanently destroyed the capacity of people to live in a “normal” temporal ordering and positive anticipation of future. For young people, the war resulted in a disheartening

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on the possibilities and foreclosures in this decade, and the role of liberals as “vanishing mediators,” see Slavoj Žižek’s text “Eastern European Liberalism and Its Discontents.”

<sup>5</sup> Not all of the ways in which the war disrupted normal sense of time were destructive. In conversations with a few of my Sarajevo-based informants, I learned that some of them felt like the siege was a moment in which one was free to do whatever they wanted, to read, to learn, to experiment, to not go to work or to school, but pursue hobbies, alternative careers and other creative project. One informant said she and her friends saw the siege as one long vacation. She also added that this time of crisis played an extraordinary formative role in her life, which left a permanent imprint of her post-war interests, desires and values.

paradox: while being prematurely catapulted in adulthood by their wartime experiences, many young Bosnians were also unable to realize their adult independence because of lack of opportunities in the postwar period. The older generations did not fare much better. Thirty-one-year old “Muamer” told me he felt that the war’s tragedies, trials and tribulations dispossessed both his parents of all of their energy, making them completely unable to think beyond the present, and consequently incapable of doing anything about the future.

This sense of paralysis that Muamer described rather resentfully was not only created by the trauma of the war, but also by the various predicaments and letdowns that Bosnians faced in its aftermath. While the signing of the Dayton Accords in late 1995 ended the fighting and nominally preserved the Bosnian state, the agreement’s provisions also divided the country into ethno-territorial units with a great deal of political autonomy. Modern Bosnia comprises of two territorial “entities” [*entiteti*], Republika Srpska and the Bosniak<sup>6</sup>-Croat Federation, which have separate institutions and laws. The Federation is subsequently divided into ten “cantons” [*kantoni*], administrative units with their own parliaments, ministries, educational systems and budgets. While this mid-level of administration does not exist in Republika Srpska, both entities have local governments at the municipal level, which have their own agencies, offices and appointed experts. In addition, the northern Bosnian town of Brčko is its own administrative unit, not belonging to Republika Srpska or the Federation, and operating as a district with specific laws and institutions. The end result of these divisions is the fact Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country comparable in size of the state of Kentucky, has thirteen different operating sets of laws, fourteen executive governments and nearly 160 ministries. According to estimates, the administrative apparatus consumes over 60 % of the GDP.

These administrative divisions, done in the name of peace, created a surplus of governing institutions, whose antagonism and lack of coordination has only further eroded citizens’ confidence in the very existence of the state. What’s more, the ethnic nature of these administrative units has served to further bolster the power of the nationalist elites that organized the wartime bloodshed. In the postwar period, various processes of privatization, economic restructuring and influx of foreign capital helped those same politicians and their collaborators evolve into a new economic oligarchy. The corrupt dealings of these new “elites” provided the frequent subject of media exposés and critical journalistic commentary, rendering the crisis demonstrable while simultaneously producing both outrage and helplessness. Often and in various contexts, my informants would tell me that the postwar period was in some ways worse than the war, because of the letdown they experienced when their expectations for the resumption of “normal life” were crushed by the reality and injustices of the new “transition.”<sup>7</sup>

In the decade following the war, a sense of stagnation and deferral was mitigated by the gradual stabilization in everyday life. The strong presence of the International Community and its emissaries, especially in the figure of the High Representative in charge of overseeing the

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<sup>6</sup> Bosniak is an old term that was used in the context of Austro-Hungarian rule of Bosnia to describe all residents of the then colonial province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, since 1990, the term has been reformulated as an ethnic and national name for Bosnian Muslims (though some use this term more broadly to speak of all Slavic Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, including the Muslim minority living in southeast Serbian region of Sandžak). It is to be distinguished from **Bosnian**, which is supposed to designate the national identity of all people living on the territory of present day Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, many nationalist Serbs and Croats, along with their nationalist political elites, reject this term “Bosnian” as a “fabrication”, and define themselves primarily through ethno-national terms.

<sup>7</sup> I use the notion of “transition” euphemistically, following the critique of Verdery and Burawoy which states that such language for talking about postsocialist transformation, in fact presupposes one particular future, where former socialist states and societies are to become just like their Western counterparts. Yet, as these authors argue, no such future is actually guaranteed nor should it be anticipated as universally desirable and good.

implementation of the Dayton Agreement, created a semblance of stability. But this sense of respite started to give way under the rising tide of nationalist rhetoric and the deepening deadlock over the EU-accession required process of constitutional reform. Although the postwar period was supposed to lead to reconciliation and the eventual constitution of a common national agenda, by the time of my arrival in 2008, the reappearance of calls for abolishing Republika Srpska from the Federation and concomitant threats of separation from the Serb-controlled territories, instead led to fears of the renewal of armed conflict.

So when the global economic crisis came knocking at the door, along with the offer of IMF loans, came new fears of deepening unemployment<sup>8</sup> and new policies of economic restructuring seeking to eliminate social programs for such categories as people with disabilities and war veterans. Yet paradoxically, during this upheaval, Federal parliamentarians voted several times to increase their salaries, despite the general impression they were doing next to nothing to earn them. It was under those circumstances that the rhetoric on the inevitable “revolution” started to emerge in public discourse and private conversations. The recourse to fantasies of total, violent upheaval testified to the fact many Bosnians were profoundly skeptical of the capacity of the tools offered by less radical forms of participatory democracy, or even voting, to produce the kind of change that could guarantee actual improvement of their collective and individual situations. An angry cab driver told me that the Bosnian society was rotten from within, and that the only way to save it was to destroy everything and build from scratch, even if, he emphasized, this scenario spelled the end for his own family. Many of my friends who did not belong to activist organizations that I was studying dismissed the activities of my informants as insufficient, too theatrical, too obtuse to have any real impact. One friend in particular said that when “my activists” become ready to throw Molotov’s cocktails on the government administration, he would be willing to join them.

These unruly comments coming from the general public cast a shadow of doubt on the hopes of international peace brokers in Bosnia and advocates of democratization, who promoted civic participation and peaceful citizen protest as remedies against pervasive political apathy that in their mind was fueling the political stagnation. Meanwhile, dignified demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, advocacy, lobbying and other such political methods seemed to many Bosnians to be a waste of time. This tension makes known not simply the persistence of inherent “totalitarian” sensibilities of postsocialist political subjects, but forms a part and parcel of the response to the ongoing political paralysis and everyday encounters with a deeply dysfunctional political system. As this dissertation will show, these alarming kinds of rhetoric and the illiberal subjectivities that articulate them, nurture seeds of ethical projects that seek to make possible rewarding forms of life within a foreclosed and often bleak political context.

### *Anthropology of the politics of impasse*

My ethnographic analysis has been informed by and seeks to contribute to three different fields of scholarly debate and intervention. First, this thesis adds to the literature in postsocialist studies that has worked to problematize the totalitarian paradigm made dominant by Cold War scholarship (for critique see e.g. Yurchak 2005; Boyer 2005; Boym 2010; also Humphrey 1998;

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<sup>8</sup> In 2012, the official national rate of unemployment was at 27%. Based on my field experience, I would say that in some parts of the country, this figure is even higher. See “Stopa nezaposlenosti u BiH među najvećim u regionu.” 2012. *6yka*. May 14. Accessed December 11, 2012. <http://www.6yka.com/novost/23523/stopa-nezaposlenosti-u-bih-medu-najvecim-u-regionu>

Verdery 1996; 2003), and the triumphalist accounts of the postsocialist “transition” into democracy and market capitalism (for problematization of the language of transition, see Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann, Humphrey and Verdery, 2002; Humphrey 2002). My engagement with such conceptual interventions in the context of postwar Bosnia, seeks to fill the void in otherwise vast and rich area scholarship (e.g. Maček 2010; Žarkov 2007; Wagner 2008; Coles 2007), which has done much to help us understand the role of war and nationalism in politics, but has not yet given adequate attention to the current impact of lived experiences and expectations formed during socialism. While a new generation of fellow anthropologists has been working to acknowledge, problematize and remedy this omission (see Jansen 2007; Gilbert 2007; Jansen, Helms, Gilbert and Greenberg 2008), ethnographically based explorations of Bosnian postsocialism remain far too few.

What is more, Bosnia’s status within the field of postsocialism remains as unique as the Yugoslav trajectory in what was socialist Europe. As Andrew Gilbert suggests, the enormity of the war has sidelined conversations about the socialist period and its legacies, so much so that there is little direct attention in Bosnia given to the postsocialist dimensions of its postwar experience. However, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, many of the values from the socialist period—such as the belief in the universal desirability of modernization, the importance of progress, the entitlement to a livable life, to free health care and education, as well as the conviction in the responsibility of the state for securing them—survived the war unscathed. Their unacknowledged presence and continued, unquestioned dominance attests to the centrality of socialist era norms to contemporary forms of political thinking and action. What’s more, the capacity of Bosnian citizens to produce shrewd comparisons between the old order and the postwar projects of social and political reengineering, suggests a certain kinship with the rest of former socialist societies, where the fall of socialism has produced new forms of critical historical consciousness. These modalities of thinking not only cherish (often a posteriori) different aspects of a previously existing world, but are also unafraid to voice their disenchantment with ideological and formulaic nature of democracy, and the perceived crisis of centralized political authority, which it helped usher.<sup>9</sup>

This dissertation also runs against the grain of contemporary anthropological concern with neoliberal ideologies, forms of organization and subjectivities they helped shape (e.g. Rose 2000; Dunn 2004; Muehlebach 2012; c.p. Kipnis 2010, Rogers 2008, also Petryna 2002 and Collier 2011 for critique of “state withdrawal”). Throughout my analysis, I have avoided speaking about the decentralization and dissipation of state power in Bosnia in terms of structural adjustment and neoliberalism, even though these kinds of logic underlay many aspects of the Dayton Constitution, EU conditionalities and broader legal and institutional reforms. I insist on this specificity of the situation in postwar Bosnia, where the processes of postwar decentralization and disappearance of the strong (socialist) state were motivated primarily by concerns for ethnic autonomy, rather than administrative reform. Furthermore, this type of decentralization did not necessarily lead to austerity or to the decrease in entitlements, but to the channeling of enormous funds into maintaining multiple and overlapping administrations,

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<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the scope of this project cannot be reduced to questions of postsocialist nostalgia and longing for a glorious past. Despite the work done by anthropologists of postsocialism to demonstrate the complexities and the slippery politics of historical and political memory, there remains a tendency, especially outside of anthropology, to treat any favorable mention of socialism as a form of “nostalgia.” I suggest rather, following Dominic Boyer (2006), that these forms of critical historical consciousness and political critique are just as much about the struggle for the future as they are about the past. To proclaim that these acts of critique and intervention are nothing but “mere nostalgia” is to also discount the forms of life constituted by and left behind these state socialist projects.

sustaining parallel schooling systems and fulfilling obligations to various clients of the state (including the politically volatile groups of war veterans and war victims). The biggest beneficiaries of these transformations have been the nationalist parties, which exploit this decentralization to secure their own power and access to resources. Almost none of these parties have an economic program that encourages market reforms or neoliberal doctrine. What is more, because this situation is a direct product of the Dayton Agreement, the International Community has so far been very reluctant to institute structural adjustment programs. In 2009, as state budgets were about to collapse due to shrinking incomes and rising costs of the administration and social care, Bosnian government began talks with the IMF, only to abandon them a short time after. So far, the situation has resembled one of a “primitive accumulation”—the original dispossession—Bosnians usually refer to it simply as “kapitalizam,” or sometimes, “demokratija.”

Secondly, this study contributes to a growing anthropological scholarship on the new forms of political imagination and ethical thought and action, arising out of broken promises of modernity and the seeming lack of viable political and economic alternatives (e.g. Ferguson 1999; Scott 2004; Piot 2010; also Mbembe 2000). As a specialist on the Balkans, I have nevertheless discovered profound resonances in my own ethnographic research with the scholarship produced by anthropologists of contemporary Africa, whose spaces of investigation, just like those of former Yugoslavia, remain haunted by Bandung and the dreams of Non-Alignment. In this sense, I draw especially from the recent debates about the ideological and political meaning of the category of future (Scott, 2004; Guyer 2007; Cranpanzano 2004; also Roitman forthcoming). The 2007 debate in the *American Ethnologist*, prompted by Jane Guyer’s provocative piece about the adverse effects of the rise of neoliberal capitalism and millennial religious movements on the possibilities of thinking and making livable “near futures,” has had a profound influence on my analysis of collapse of postwar, postsocialist futures in present day Bosnia. Yet, rather surrender these questions to the critique of neoliberalism, I insist on the situated histories of the category of the future, that come to inform its spectral reappearance in political discourse and action.

In framing future as a historical problem, I have sought conceptual insights in the philosophies of history which insist that historical interpretation is less about documentation, and more about remaking the world through a dialogic relationship between the past and the present (Koselleck 2002, 2004; LaCapra 1983; Ranciere 1994; de Certeau 1988b). In taking on such view of historical interpretation, this dissertation relies on performative and non-referential understandings of language (Austin 1975; Butler 1997a, 1997b; Bakhtin 1981; Derrida 1977; also Yurchak 2005) in order to simultaneously attend to both historicity of practices, values and symbols and their capacity for transformation through repetition in new contexts. Much of this ethnography is concerned with the authority vested in the past, arguing that to be compelling, political articulation must make historical sense.

Last, but not the least, this dissertation is a work in contemporary political anthropology that seeks to contribute to and complicate understandings of the work of disciplinary power in the process of production of political subjects. Given the historical resonances of the concept of “država” in my research context, my analysis remains focused on the role of the state as the seat of political authority (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Adams 2010; Roitman 2005; Dunn 2008; also Aretxaga 2003), and must hence leave aside more contemporary anthropological concerns with emergent and informal forms of non-state sovereignty. My work reframes law-preserving activities of the state as a necessary form of violence, which does not always create resistance,

but can itself become an object of citizen desire. By making such an argument, this ethnography stages a challenge to universalizing assumptions inherent in global projects focused on promoting “participatory democracy,” to which free association and civic participation (though only in some of its more desirable forms) presents an unquestionable good, whose shortage, or better yet “inadequate development,” in postsocialist contexts must be rectified.

My goal in this ethnography is to problematize the very “problem of apathy,” and find more useful ways of thinking about non-participation as well as some of the less conventional, and perhaps also illiberal forms of political involvement. As Jessica Greenberg (2010) has recently argued in the context of Serbia, the moralizing discourses about apathy in former socialist states tend to more strongly reflect the normative frames that guide projects of promotion of democracy in the aftermath of Yugoslav wars, than the actual empirical realities of political practice in these countries. Greenberg also shows that the emphasis on political participation, which is central to post-Cold War democratization policy, is relatively recent; historically, “the masses” were deemed threatening to the democratic order and seen as incapable, too immature, or too uneducated to represent themselves” (Greenberg 2010, 59). The argument was made by a new generation of political theorists who posited that participation was central to engendering proper forms of subjectivity and sociality. Participation in political processes is therefore seen as a means through which one becomes a political subject but also attests her membership in a particular moral community. Failure to engage is thereby seen as a failure to become a proper political and moral person—an act to be stigmatized, criticized and ultimately remedied.

*Politics of Impasse* poses a direct challenge of this view; it works to make space for the resigned, acquiescent and sometimes ostensibly corrupted forms of human agency, and place them in their historical and political context. Despite potent poststructuralist critiques, there remains in social science a valorization of heroic capacity for resistance at the expense of various forms of complicity and acquiescence, which though occasionally opportunistic, cannot be reduced to the notion of false consciousness. Proposing that we view apathy and complicity as active and responsive ways of being, I make space for rethinking political subjectivity outside of the model of what Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) has called the autological subject of late liberalism. Through this process, I hope to deal a blow to the persistent fiction that the solution to the Bosnian predicament lies in the increase in political participation among ordinary citizens. Instead, I show how particular arrangements of political power themselves yield parameters for political action and ethical existence, within which individuals and communities must make their futures, and indeed, endure.

### *Places, Methods, Positions*

The bulk of research for this dissertation has been conducted between June 2008 and October 2009, with subsequent follow up trips in the summers of 2010 and 2011. In addition to these trips, I spent the summers of 2006 and 2007 in Bosnia, preparing the terrain for my future ethnographic fieldwork in Sarajevo and Jajce. During this long research process, I relied on the standard staples of ethnographic research including participant-observation and various forms of formal and informal interviewing, made possible by my long-term stays, integration into the daily life of the communities that welcomed me and the relationships that I have continued to cultivate with the people whose insights and struggles provide the body of this dissertation. I

took part in meetings, public gatherings, forums, street actions, protests and various acts of political provocation, in addition to attending cultural events, screenings, theatre shows, reading contemporary Bosnian novels and spending hundreds of hours sipping coffee with my interlocutors. I recorded insights gleaned through these encounters in the form of field notes, reflections, voice recordings and still photography. In addition to ethnographic methods, I also relied on a range of other strategies, including dedicated daily analysis of media discourse (both print and broadcast), collection of various documents, fliers, posters, as well as multimedia artifacts, (including photos, videos, artworks and cartoons), gathering and analysis of various policy and assessment reports, and a great deal of online research, which included reading blogs, discussion forums and many rancorous comments on social media and online news sites. I did a fair amount of research in the archives of the Media Center in Sarajevo and through its online database. In the summer of 2011, I also took advantage of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Research Lab at the Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian Center, where I looked at original language, primary and secondary sources, such as expert literature, government publications, academic periodicals and establishment reviews, all from the late socialist period in Yugoslavia. The material analyzed here represents, as is often the case, only a fraction of my research archive.

My choice of sites also represents an important aspect of my research design. I situated significant part of my research in the capital, Sarajevo, because the activist initiatives I was most interested in studying were based there. Sarajevo is the seat of Federal and state (*državne*) government, and offers the greatest concentration of civic associations and informal political groups, which contribute to a unique political atmosphere in the city. In the spring of 2008, as I was preparing for my fieldwork, I was also surprised by and drawn to the wave of mass protests in Sarajevo, which offered an opportunity to trace ethnographically some of the more abstract conceptual questions that have been informing my research. Those included the nature of the relationship between the past and the future, the effect of socialist values and norms on contemporary forms of politics, the role of the state in postwar imaginary, and the “problem” of civic disengagement from politics. Citizen Action, the group that emerged out of these protests, became a locus of my ethnographic effort in Sarajevo, because of the diversity of its membership, the innovative character of its strategies and the profound capacities of its activists to analyze and reflect on the given political moment. In addition to Citizen Action, I also followed the work of several other political organizations, including the Dosta, ACIPS, Dobro and the Sarajevo branch of the Tito Memorial Society [*Udruženje Josip Broz Tito*].

However, I was from the start concerned that the singular character of dynamics in Sarajevo provided an exceptional, rather than representative insight into political life in postwar Bosnia. I also felt the impetus to ground my study at least in part in a traditional ethnography of a place, hoping that a prolonged stay in a smaller, more tight-knit community would offer a different perspective on the problems of future anticipation and civic participation. With its rich historical heritage, complex local political dynamics, and symbolic status as the birthplace of socialist Yugoslavia, Jajce emerged to the top of the list of candidates. There, against the backdrop of a devastating economic decline, nationalist accommodation and conflict, and the haunting remains of what was once Yugoslavia, I focused on the dynamics of everyday life, neighborly relations, the struggles of community leaders, the work of activists and local government agencies on the refashioning a future out of Jajce’s history. I closely observed the struggles around the AVNOJ Museum, which commemorates the 1943 founding of the “Second Yugoslavia,” and the efforts to place Jajce on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which had

reached an apex during my stay in the town. Finally, I routinely attended social gatherings and celebrations, visited homes and offices of my interlocutors, and for a few months attempted to teach English to a class of aspiring middle-age tourism entrepreneurs.

During my 2011 trip, I also ventured into parts of the country administratively located in Republika Srpska, and spent a few months in the regional capital and Serb stronghold of Banja Luka. The research I conducted there with the still inchoate activist group “Oštra Nula” [Sharp Zero], and the local chapters of Tito Memorial Societies, has also helped place my findings from the Federation into a different context. In Banja Luka, I relied on a similar arsenal of methods, but due to the lack of time, conducted a greater number of formal interviews, with various experts and community leaders. However, most of this fieldwork was done with an explicit focus on the non-experts: residents of the communities I studied, neighbors, informal community leaders and amateur and grassroots activists. My interactions with the internationals, government officials, journalists and leaders of major think tanks and donor organizations were limited. These choices reflected my desire to investigate how citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who did not make a living by analyzing the political situation, came to understand and navigate the contours of the postwar political. In some cases, the names of original authors of these insights have been replaced with pseudonyms, to protect confidentiality. On few occasions I also changed for the same reasons other identifying parameters. However, since some of my interlocutors became public personas in their own right, I occasionally but with their permission opted to use their real names. I have marked the use of a pseudonym with quotation marks in the instance of the first appearance of certain people in this text.

Last, but not the least, my ethnographic research was shaped in important ways by my own position as a Sarajevo-born, American trained scholar and diasporan Bosnian whose family emigrated to the United States shortly after the end of the Bosnian war. I wish to acknowledge this, while also confessing that I remain skeptical about the rubric of “native anthropology” for a range of reasons. I have doubts something akin to an authentic insider actually exists (see Narayan 1993), given the complexity of our subject positions and the variability of ethnographic contexts. Philosophically, I also oppose the label “native” because it conflates affinity with identity, and assigns a particular kind of virtue (rather than myopia) to intimate knowledge of a place. That being said, my interlocutors often perceived me as some version of “naša” (ours), though what they meant by that varied across my different ethnographic sites. In general, this was an advantage that opened many doors, which may have otherwise been closed. But it also made unavailable certain questions (because I was presumed to know the answers), and brought new challenges to the management of ethnographic rapports. One of those challenges concerned my decision to become officially a member of Citizen Action in the fall of 2008. I write about inhabiting these two figures of the anthropologist and activist extensively in the last chapter.

### *Specters and Struggles: Outline of Chapters*

*Politics of Impasse* consists of six chapters divided into two different thematic clusters. The first is called “Specters”—and focuses on particular ways in which historical experience and imagination come to inform, shape and haunt the present-day predicaments of people among whom I conducted my research. The rich genealogy of this titular term, starting with its famous invocation by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, and more recent elaboration in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, brings into foreground the thick histories behind contemporary forms of



political imagination, which although reconfigured in novel ways, carry with them resonances of past experience. Yet, as this dissertation contends, the past does not inform the present in some kind of a vulgar, mechanistic manner, but rather in ways that are often surprising, incomplete, contested and spectral. The attention I have given to this spectrality of socialist history in present-day Bosnia, has been offered in the spirit of Dominic LaCapra's argument that the work of contextualization is always one of problematization and intervention (LaCapra 1983, 30-35). To do so, I have drawn out the dialogical relationships between the past and present uses of such terms as the revolution, crisis, "brotherhood and unity," and "normal life." The second part of the dissertation, "Struggles," looks more specifically at the activist interventions, political practices and aesthetic-political forms that have emerged in response to the postwar impasse. Such tactics form part and parcel of the effort to produce a more desirable future, by transforming the relationship of citizens with the state, possible forms of political action and ethical projects that inform them.

The dissertation's first chapter, "A Strange, Alien Hour: The Postwar Impasse and Its Discontents," provides a broader, ethnographic introduction to the protracted political, social and economic paralysis that followed the end of the 1992-95 war. Against the backdrop of the political stalemate created by the terms of the Dayton Peace Agreement, I focus on the various temporal displacements that characterize personal biographies and social life at large, in order to capture the rhythm and feeling produced by broken promises of postwar reconstruction and the subsequent loss of futurity. Instead of framing this disenchanting present in terms of an immanent crisis, I argue that the Bosnian situation bears the mark of an indefinite suspension, one that does not simply impede but also enables new forms of life and politics. In place of crisis, a category whose analytic potential has been eroded by its prolonged use in political, academic and media discourse, I propose an alternative set of terms based on the formulations gleaned during fieldwork, including "birvakat" (a strange hour), "eternal temporarity" and zombie state.

Chapter Two, "The National(ist) Order of Things and the Ghosts of Socialist Multinationalism," provides an ethnographic perspective on post-Dayton Bosnia and nationalist politics, by looking at the micro-dynamics of patronage in the town of Jajce, a deindustrialized, war-devastated community once celebrated as the birthplace of Socialist Yugoslavia. Through a chronicle of the struggles of several inhabitants of this town as they attempt to build a future for themselves and their families, I provide an anthropologically informed and ethnographically grounded perspective on how nationalist parties retain their grip on power despite having done little to better the economy or conditions of life. Rejecting "culturalist" explanations and reductive view of nationalism as a form of "false consciousness," I instead attend to the forms of disciplinary power exercised with the intent of producing a new kind of a subject, more amenable to the postwar order of things and people. I show how despite the use of such political and social technologies of delineation of ethnic boundaries, this new nationalist reconfiguration must also face the residual epistemologies and values that sometimes trouble, disrupt and suspend these processes of transformation. The last part of this chapter deals most directly with the status of (Yugo)nostalgia by looking at the contradictions that often shape its formal expressions, during gatherings of memorial societies and other Yugosnostalgic groups.

The third chapter, "Afterlives of the Socialist Santa: Pedagogies: Aesthetics and Politics of 'Normal Life,'" looks at the controversy surrounding the attempted ban of Socialist Santa or Deda Mraz [Grandpa Frost] in Sarajevo's kindergartens, which in unexpected ways brought to surface tensions in the transformations of social norms and pedagogy during times of tremendous ideological and political flux. Traversing a great deal of historical and ethnographic ground,

including a history of contention over New Year's holidays, I offer the Deda Mraz Affair as a case study on the problem of figuring out the bounds of "the normal" and "the absurd" in postwar Bosnia. Although socialist Yugoslavia introduced this holiday figure into the lives of young citizens of a shared state, the practices of gift giving attained their own value and developed affective attachments that surpassed the political proscriptions in which these holiday rites originated. The dramatic public reaction in defense of Deda Mraz attests to the dissolved state's relative success in producing a particular kind of citizen subject. Moreover, Deda Mraz's continued relevance and survival despite multiple attacks, shows that socialist experience, moral imaginaries and pedagogies retain their force even in the moment where the state that produced them no longer exists. The relevance of this past and especially its impacts on the new generations is the ground of intense political struggle.

The "Socialist Santa" chapter provides a transition into the discussion of postwar struggles staged by groups of activists in Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo. The fourth chapter, "Sarajevo's Spring of Discontent: Youth, Public Safety and Matters of Care" analyzes the surprising wave of 2008 protests, inspired by a shocking murder of a high school student, Denis Mrnjavac, by three underage offenders. Hailed as the first mass civic mobilization in postwar Bosnia, the protests were remarkable not only for their scale, length and creativity, but for the variety of issues and demands that they brought to the public's attention. Asking that the local and state governments address the issue of deteriorating public safety and the crisis of the juvenile justice system, these protests placed urgent political stakes in a different language—one that was not simply overdetermined by nationalist rhetoric and interests. The first part of the chapter narrates the development of the protests and looks at how the issue of youth delinquency became such a powerful rallying cry. The second part of the chapter focuses more specifically on the individuals who emerged as some of the most ardent protesters, and ultimately organizers of these mobilizations. I highlight especially how their own challenges as parents came to inform the demands and the direction of the protests and their subsequent activist work. I propose that we read the "youth delinquent" as a figure of historical and political consciousness, and a nexus of powerful anxieties about the future that is to come.

Next chapter, "Fool's errand: Political Action as Ethical Practice," builds on the previous dedicated to the 2008 protests to describe what happened when a fraction of the protesters decided to continue their work in the form of a registered citizens' association. The rationales behind their decision, the debates that preceded it and the conflicts that followed it, provide a case study for an anthropological critique of the civil society model and promotion of participatory democracy more specifically. I argue Bosnian activists are caught between the desire and necessity of producing a recognizable, authoritative format for their political practice, and the fact such formats produce additional contradictions and paradoxes that erode their ability to organize themselves and intervene in the political sphere. Activists are well aware of these problems, and actively reflect on both the potentials and enclosures of activist labor, at times describing their labors as foolish and insignificant. Consequently, this chapter explores what it may mean to engage in political action while anticipating failure.

The last chapter, "Activism as Play" looks at a range of unconventional political strategies employed by activists in Sarajevo, including the use of giant grotesque puppet heads of the nationalist politicians to stage street provocations and the ironic billboard campaigns calling out to the officials suspected of corruption. I particularly follow the case of a mysterious incriminating graffiti, which appeared on the garage door of a high ranking former official in the Bosnian government, and soon after inspired a couple of thousands of random citizens, to call

their local police stations and “confess” that they personally were the authors of this message. I show how these strategies render visible the profoundly sinister, insincere, and immoral nature of politics, while also forging new forms of solidarity and redefining pragmatic understandings of limits and possibilities of activist engagement.

Finally, this dissertation closes with some rumination on the complex political field that has emerged in the aftermath of the Bosnian war, the fall of socialism and the breakup of multinational Yugoslavia. Through an account of another murder, a snapshot of a barricade and a haunting image of two books, I suggest that the seeming overdetermined nature of political life in Bosnia retains its capacity to surprise.

## CH 1: A STRANGE, ALIEN HOUR: THE POSTWAR IMPASSE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

*Drugarice Antipova,*

*Drago mi je dobiti poruku od nekoga ko je pomalo nemotivisan, jerbo smo ovdje, uglavnom, demotivisani pojako. Otkako nam je Haris Pašović pokazao da u nama još ima osjećanja koja smo odavno zaboravili, i provukao nas kroz centrifugu već mašine napravljene od crvenih stolica, stanje je još gore. Mrak se širi brzinom svjetlosti, a pogana rječ je, kao i do sada, slađa od baklave. Ljudi, bogme i žene, su se povukli u svoja mikrosvjetove, popunjavajući svoje gusto naseljene samoće, ispužu kada se ukaže neka svjetlost, ili kakva fatamorgana. Po baksuzluku, uvijek to bude svjetlo kratkog sjaja, ali, da dušu ne griješim, fatamorgane su nam prilično trajne. Ukratko, "The World's mine oyster" u ovdašnjem prijevodu glasi: "My oyster is my world... thou shall not have other oysters before me". Kao što iz ovog prijevoda vidiš, što je svijet manji, više riječi nam treba da ga objasnimo.*

*Jazuk što te neće biti ovog ljeta, jer rudnik zlata za antropologe je ovaj grad, ali antropolozi ne mogu mu prići. Psihijatri zauzeli sve kote.*

*Inače- stanje redovno. Dijete raste, svira, uživa u svome pubertetu, koliko se već u pubertetu može uživati. Roditelji inače nisu poznati po tome da uživaju u pubertetu svojih potomaka, ali znaš mene, ja sam kontraš. Ja također sviram, snimam, pišem... spremam se da zбриšem, ili se barem tomu nadam.*

Sarajevo, April 2012

*Comrade Antipova,*

*I am glad to receive a message from someone slightly demotivated, since we here, for the most part, are demotivated a lot. Since Haris Pašović showed us that there are feelings inside us that we have long forgotten, and took us through the centrifuge made out of red chairs, the situation is even worse. The darkness spreads at the speed of light, and a filthy word is, as it has been for a while, sweeter than baklava. Men, and women also, have retracted into their microworlds, filling out their densely inhabited solitudes, and crawl out only when some light appears, or some Fata Morgana. Given our bad fortune, those lights last only for a short time, but to tell the truth, our mirages are pretty permanent. In short: The world is my oyster" in local translation states: "My oyster is my world...thou shall not have any other oysters before me." As you see in this translation, the smaller the world is, the more words we need to describe it.*

*It's a waste that you won't be here this summer, because this city is a gold mine for anthropologists, but anthropologists cannot even come near it. Psychiatrists have taken over all the strategic posts.*

*Otherwise, same old. The child is growing, playing music, enjoying his puberty, as much as one can enjoy a puberty. Parents aren't really known to enjoy the puberty of their progeny, but you know me, I'm a contrarian. I've also been playing music, recording, writing...I am getting ready to run away, or at least that is what I hope for.*

Sarajevo, April 2012

In early April 2012, a few days before the bitter twentieth anniversary of the start of war in Bosnia, I wrote to one of my key ethnographic interlocutors in Sarajevo, forty-six-year-old veteran of the Bosnian Army, disgruntled political protester and prolific blogger, Plamenko. Just after the April 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he responded with this poignant letter, offered not simply as a personal correspondence, but also as a commentary on the Zeitgeist of the times.<sup>1</sup> His message

<sup>1</sup> Plamenko subsequently made this letter public, by uploading the text to one of his blogs. The posting can be found at: <http://cortomaltese.blogger.ba/arhiva/2012/04/20> (last accessed on December 12, 2012). I have translated and included the text of the correspondence with Plamenko's permission.

and the series of images it conveys, mark a tremendous reversal of spirits from the one I encountered when I first met Plamenko and his fellow activists in 2008. At that time, a sequence of unexpected mass mobilizations in Bosnia's capital inspired Plamenko and his activist companions to engineer a number of exciting political and aesthetic interventions. During this brief period, among at least one portion of the city's inhabitants, there emerged something akin to a sense of possibility, in the form of a cautious, modest kind of hope.

By contrast, Plamenko's 2012 letter, addressed to this anthropologist, friend and political ally (comrade!), portrays present-day Bosnia through the images of pervasive lethargy, disenchantment with human weakness and corruption, and thick solitude amidst fleeting lights and permanent delusion. Plamenko's paragraphs render tangible many gradients of despair borne out of bitterness and exhaustion, which have been building in Bosnian society over the course of the last decade. According to Plamenko, and indeed many of my other informants, this sense of postwar impasse imprisons and chokes, and can only temporarily be made better through the withdrawal into private obsessions and intimate domesticities. Declaring that the only real hope can only be found in dreams of exile, he suggests that in post-Dayton Bosnia, future has become simultaneously displaced, atomized and perhaps even, past. Reporting just outside the somber Bosnian anniversary, Plamenko remarks on the unfinished catharsis brought about by the staging of the interactive monument "Red Line." The monument's creator, theatre director Haris Pašović, laid out some 11,000 chairs on the central boulevard in the city, to remind Sarajevans and the world of those who died during the 45-month-long military siege of the Bosnian capital. In acknowledging the interpolative effect produced by this dramatic intervention, Plamenko calls to attention that effects of wars linger long after the fighting has ceased.



**Figure 1:** Instalation "11, 541 Sarajevo Red Line," mentioned in Plamenko's letter, staged on the 20th anniversary of the war in Bosnia (Photo courtesy of Emir Jaganjac).

A friend's melancholy portrayal of the Bosnian postwar atmosphere serves here as the narrative entry point into the situation that provided the backdrop to my ethnographic research: the protracted political, social and economic paralysis that followed the end of the 1992-95 war. The introduction laid out in the broadest of brush strokes some of the structural reasons behind this postwar (dis)order, explaining how the terms of internationally brokered peace placed crucial political questions on hold, deferring their resolution into the indefinite future. Today, seventeen years since the ratification of the Dayton agreement, issues of ethno-national and state sovereignty, which played the central role in the war, remain unresolved. Within the convoluted and fragmented structure instituted by Dayton, longstanding disagreements among local political elites have exacerbated chronic problems and put the process of political reform at a standstill. Bosnia, declare international journalists, foreign diplomats, think-tank analysts and local citizens themselves, is yet again—in crisis.<sup>2</sup> Twenty years after its capital first came under siege, the country's future seems bleak and uncertain.

However, despite this uncertainty, the last seventeen years in Bosnia have led to significant social, political and economic transformations. Some of these changes have enabled the welcome resuturing of everyday life and previously broken relationships. But many others proved disappointing to those citizens of Bosnia whose standards of normality were tempered by the privileges afforded by Yugoslavia's moderate state socialism. The key culprit for this deteriorating climate in society is the political situation, which this chapter analyzes in some detail. The political deadlock, however, has managed to seep into all spheres of social life, including community dynamics, neighborly and familial relations and even the body itself. This chapter on the postwar impasse traverses these different scales, through a series of ethnographic images and stories, gathered between 2006 and 2011 at various sites across the country. Like Plamenko's letter, my account seeks to convey the rhythm and atmosphere produced by broken promises of postwar reconstruction and the subsequent loss of futurity.

The chapter's broader aim, however, is to introduce alternative ways of thinking about these displacements and their effects, beyond the languages of crisis, decline and degeneracy, which have been proliferating within and without Bosnian borders over the last twenty years. For this purpose, I have mined my ethnographic archive, various analytic reports, pages of international and local newspapers, long forgotten expert literature from the Yugoslav socialist era and even the margins of Bosnian cybersphere, bringing artifacts together into what will at times read as utter empirical chaos. This effect is in fact, intended, for my goal is both to overwhelm the reader and to create a maelstrom out of which alternative vocabularies—for thinking about Bosnia otherwise—can be conjured up.

And so, my analysis travels along the following axes. I draw on and contribute to recent scholarly interventions that have sought to problematize and locate historically the concept of crisis, as well as the myopias to political thinking to which its circulation gives rise (e.g. Roitman 2011; 2012; Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Khan 2009; Shevchenko 2009; Nadkarni 2012; see also Koselleck 1988). To do so, I offer an account of the circulation of this term that spans from

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<sup>2</sup> See especially the reports of the International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/bosnia-herzegovina.aspx>), published between 2007 and 2011, peace briefs of the US Institute of Peace (notably Serwer 2010 and Bassunuer and Lyon 2009) and the Holbrook-Ashdown 2008 letter published in the Guardian under the title "A Bosnian Power Keg" (accessible at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/oct/22/ashdown-holbrooke-bosnia-balkan-dayton?INTCMP=SRCH>). For paradigmatic international news reporting on the issue, see BBC's "Bosnia Nears a Critical Crisis Point" February 23, 2010 (accessible at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8530236.stm>), "Bosnia Lurches into a New Crisis" from The Guardian's Observer, May 2, 2009 (accessible at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/03/bosnia-war-nationalism-poor-economy?INTCMP=SRCH>) and "Bosnia Flounders as Powers Argue" from NY Times, June 27, 2011 (accessible at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/28/world/europe/28iht-bosnia28.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/28/world/europe/28iht-bosnia28.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)).



the late socialist era in Yugoslavia through 1992-95 war and the several stages of the postwar international oversight of Bosnia. I argue that the prolonged use of crisis as a mode of emplotment of historical experience has rendered this term imprecise and misleading, turning it into a conceptual and political obstacle. Instead of taking “crisis” as a given diagnosis of the political present, I view it as a figure whose value lies not in its representational force, but in the sorts of political thought and action that it helps make conceivable or unimaginable. Importantly, while disavowing “crisis” as a conceptual category, I nevertheless acknowledge its ubiquity and show how it travels (sometimes under different guises) across my ethnographic terrain.

In addition to introducing the reader to the situation in contemporary Bosnia, much of this chapter is dedicated to exploring dissident voices and alternative vocabularies. Drawing on my ethnographic pursuits of various dimensions of the postwar impasse, in place of state of emergency (i.e. Benjamin 1996 [1921]; Schmitt 2007 [1927]; Agamben 2005; also Fassin and Pandolfi 2010) and the normative calls for intervention that often go hand in hand with such frames, I propose that we begin thinking about the Bosnian situation<sup>3</sup> as a form of suspension or indefinite deferment. This suspension, which feeds on a frustrating political paralysis and elicits absurd effects on people’s lives, not only further erodes linear narratives of postwar (or postsocialist) transition, but also demands a new kind of an anthropological thinking about the political. This intervention becomes all the more important, because “the crisis” has proven to be a fertile ground for social and political critique (previewed in Plamenko’s fecund letter).

Such critique translates into reconfigured forms of political thought and action, which although in some ways reactive and novel, carry deep resonances with lived memories and historical experience. The prickly affective character of these forms of criticism also gives rise to pungent, locally brewed lexicons that do not deny the effects of the postwar “crisis,” but also hint at how these impossible states are rendered habitable. I borrow from my ethnographic informants a few alternative coinages: that of *birvakat*, inertia and zombie state. *Birvakat*, a neologism born out of an archaic word, speaks of one’s estrangement from time itself. The notion of “a strange, alien hour,” reminds of the insight offered by the late anthropologist, Claudio Lomnitz (2003), that times of crisis place the very category of time *in crisis*. Inertia, as I subsequently argue, provides a way of thinking about the postwar suspension as its own generative force, capable of producing effects even in perceived absence of movement or change. Finally, I borrow from the discussion—taking place at the intersection of literary experimentation, political analyses and rhetoric of the everyday— of Bosnia as a “zombie state.” Through the analysis of this strange metaphor, I insist on the vitality, rather than failure, of the forms of social life emerging against (and because) of the prolonged political suspension. In turning the tables in this way, I am preparing in this chapter the ground on which my subsequent analyses (dedicated more robustly to politics of the everyday) will lay.

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<sup>3</sup> Lauren Berlant proposes the term “situation” as one of the “aesthetic genres for describing the activity of being reflexive about a contemporary historicity one lives in...one in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life” (Berlant 2011, 5). A situation suspends, yet also makes palpable the possible emergence of an event whose repercussions and meanings are yet to be known. The situation is “therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing, but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos” (7). In Berlant’s conceptual apparatus, the impasse and the situation are distinct genres, one temporal, the other aesthetic, but nevertheless closely related and crucial for understanding our present.

## PART I: A Lexicon of the Postwar Impasse

*“Birvakat”*: a crisis that is not an event, but a condition

A **clever play** on a Bosnian turkicisms forms a new, non-existent word. From *birvaktile* ~ a local expression derived out of Turkish (**bir vakit** ~ [at] one time), that has come to describe something “archaic, alien, strange, not of this time.” With the accent placed on the latter part of the composite *vakat* (in Turkish vakit) ~ hour, we arrive at **birvakat**—a strange, alien hour; a time not of this time; a time regressed.

For nearly twenty years, in international media, among political analysts and academic researchers, representations of Bosnia-Herzegovina have relied on a family of terms, phrases and metaphors, as varied as collapse (Cohen and Dragović-Soso 2008), chaos (Woodward 1995a), deconstruction (Campbell 1998), house divided (Hayden 1999) and a “Tower of Babel” (Ramet 2002). These terms sought to capture the horrors and the humanitarian disaster of the 1992-1995 war that killed some 100,000 people and displaced two million.<sup>4</sup> The expulsion of refugees, sieges of cities and towns, and creation of internment and rape camps, came into view as events that cut through the fabric of people’s everyday lives and their sense of order in the world. To others, these moments laid truth bare—the “truth” that Yugoslavia had been nothing but a “totalitarian state” or “the prison house of nations,” and that the war had always been inevitable. As first bombings, expulsions and murders started, the country’s middle classes, which cherished antipolitics was a way of life, watched in disbelief, confidently proclaiming: “the world would not let this happen to us!” As years of war rolled on and Bosnians learned just how little metropolises usually cared about loss of life in peripheries, such appeals became far less confident. As a round upon round of peace negotiations fell through, it appeared as if Bosnia’s geographic location and the European “never again” post-WWII promise in the end mattered very little.

And then, in a startling turn of events, following the atrocious fall of Srebrenica and the last marketplace massacre in Sarajevo, the shift in the resolve of the US lead “International Community” ushered in the unprecedented NATO intervention in October 1995.<sup>5</sup> Pro-Bosnian forces welcomed this intervention, even if it materialized too late for some 8,000 people slaughtered in the eastern Bosnian “safe haven” and thousands of others who died at different scaffolds. Bombardment of Serb military positions was swiftly followed by a new round of negotiations that lead to the signing of Dayton Accords. Despite its accolades in the arenas of international diplomacy, in Bosnia proper, Dayton began its life described as “a terrible peace to end a terrible war.” Those words, uttered by Bosnian president and one of the signatories of the agreement, Alija Izetbegović, turned out to be prophetic. Over the next seventeen years, Dayton would make possible a new political “crisis” whose social ramifications Plamenko so eloquently captures in his letter.

In this chapter, and the dissertation at large, my interest lies not so much with global ramifications of the discourse and practices of intervention, but rather in their peculiar, localized effects on the prevailing epistemologies which help residents of Bosnia make sense of

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<sup>4</sup> In Bosnia proper, the naming of this war remains a problem. Those underlining the internationally recognized independence of Bosnia and the role of armies from the neighboring countries still use the term “aggression,” while their opponents insist on the term “civil war.” The use of these previously listed terms from the literature, on some level attempts to provide a more “neutral” frame, emphasizing the tragedy and the shock of this war, but preserving the semblance of impartiality.

<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the later developments on the ground, this extraordinary if belated NATO intervention, inaugurated a new era of international policy whose importance far surpasses Bosnian borders. The case of Bosnia, more than any other, helped humanitarianism to become, as Roitman (2011, forthcoming) asserts, a late 20th-century form of social and political critique.



absurdities of postwar existence. The language of crisis survived the war in Bosnia, in part because it was able to effectively capture the type of peace Dayton Accords offered. While the agreement, which would also become the new state's constitution, stopped the violence, it also left unresolved crucial political issues. By preserving the nominal independence of the state while dividing Bosnia into ethnic units that could guarantee a degree of autonomy to the three national groups, Dayton legalized wartime conquests and ethnic cleansing and awarded elites that organized the bloodshed.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, its makers trusted that Dayton's full implementation, which included paradoxical provisions for ethnicization of territory and full return of refugees (which would render ethnic homogenization impossible), would make the agreement implode upon itself. Yet they did not quite count on how few victims of ethnic cleansing would actually return to the sites of horror, and how many would voluntarily exchange their property and move to parts of the country where their ethnic group now formed the majority. Others, allegedly the best and brightest, left Bosnia all together, to seek their fortune elsewhere [*Pametni su otišli*]. The nationalist elites only grew bolder, and more trusting of the ability of incendiary rhetoric to keep economic and corruption scandals out of the ballot box. In a stunning reversal of Hobessian doctrine, the peace rendered politics impossible.

But not everything was so bleak at the start. Older generations remembered the post-WWII period, Truman's eggs, first mandarins, and most of all, the spectacular postwar recovery of socialist Yugoslavia. The end of this more recent war brought back more than a glimmer of hope, inspiring a ubiquitous, mundane phrase: "All is good while there's no shooting" [*Sve je dobro dok se ne puca*]. International oversight of Dayton imposed peace, at first made possible such things as common currency, a new flag and standardized license plates, creating a sense that a shared future was not only possible, but perhaps also inevitable. Cooperation with International Community's agencies and acceptance of languages of tolerance and reconciliation opened doors to reconstruction funds and investment, even in the most nationalist and politically explosive parts of Republika Srpska. The flow of donations into the country helped some return to their burned-down houses, and made possible for those more fortunate to repair their windows and their roofs. Funds intended to build Bosnia's civil society helped those who were both jobless and enterprising to establish and find employment in NGOs. Donations resuscitated public transportation and (re)built a sea of churches and mosques. Consumer goods trickled in, and along with them came possibilities for micro-credit loans, for a home computer, a pair of sofa couches, even a car. 46-year-old Jasmina, a grassroots activist, smiles as she tells me how good it felt to have those 10 Marks (5 Euros) in her pocket in 1997. Having those ten marks offered a veritable sense of possibility, a promise of a better future.

Yet over time, donations slowed, as International Community declared there were now new hotspots of humanitarian crisis where some other people had more urgent needs. Meanwhile, a wave of crooked privatizations of factories and firms left former workers outside of new arenas of circulation of capital and goods; armies of laborers that once worked for state owned enterprises were placed "on stand by" literally, "on waiting" [*na čekanje*]. Those who were more fortunate and better connected found jobs in the vast post-war administrative apparatus and the growing private sectors, where many depended on the goodness of their patrons to receive healthcare benefits and social security. In the best case scenario, patrons

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<sup>6</sup> If such an evaluation of the peace seems unfair toward nationalist Bosnian Serbs (or even Bosnian Croats), for this author the crucial issue of contention is not "Serb" opposition to Bosnian independence or their presumed fear of becoming an ethnic minority in the new state, but the grizzly methods the Bosnian Serb army, various paramilitary forces and Serb-controlled Yugoslav National Army systematically employed in the name of national sovereignty and aspirations toward territorial expansion and ethnic dominance.

fudged the books by officially paying their workers less, so as to control the costs of insurance, while giving their workers a portion of their real salaries under the table. That is a good thing, because new shopping centers opened, some catering to the proletariat with their walmartesque array of cheap goods, others mimicking the distantly exotic tastes of rich Arab Dubaians. Enterprising networks of Chinese showed up to open “kineske prodavnice” (“Chinese shops”) across small towns in Bosnia. These “dollar stores” are just one piece of proof that the purchasing power of an average citizen of Bosnia cannot not keep up with the ever growing, ever so tempting supply.

In April 2006, a major package of reforms that would have simplified the administrative apparatus, amended the Dayton constitution and presumably brought Bosnia closer to EU membership, fell through, due to rising antagonisms between Serb and Bosniak elites, who won elections promising their constituencies incommensurable goals. Bosniak demands for greater political centralization and the dissolution of war-created Serb entity clashed with Serb aspirations towards greater autonomy or downright separation. Believing a better deal was possible, Bosniak leadership, headed at this stage by Bosnia’s wartime Minister of Foreign Affairs, Haris Silajdžić, and his “Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina” rejected this 2006 package of reforms, setting in motion this current paralysis. A new round of elections in 2010 replaced the old Bosniak leadership with nominally antinationalist Social Democrats, which (while playing the system against the dwindling numbers of Croat voters) promised to solve the country’s crisis. Despite celebratory tone in the fall of 2010, when this “Opposition” won in the Federation, the situation appears to have taken a turn for the worse. The Social Democrats, who supposedly provide a progressive, antinationalist alternative, have turned out to be more similar to than different from their opponents. It took the winning parties fourteen months to negotiate the composition of the new state government. Perhaps things would be different if the International Community would intervene. But, at the delight of some and horror of others, once decisive foreign representatives have been replaced with an anemic new generations of foreign diplomats primarily interested in devising an exist strategy, making some money and getting the hell out.

While nationalists bickered, the global financial collapse exacerbated existing economic problems. The entity government in the Federation faced extensive budget deficits, which made imminent the negotiations with the IMF. First major protests aimed at the government began in 2008; citizens complained about rise in juvenile crime and deterioration of public safety, and targeted officials for the neglect of their duties, moral irresponsibility and decadence. On several occasions throughout 2009, aggressive crowds of former military fighters threatened to bring down the government, if their pensions and entitlements were cut. In a country where unofficially, more than a third of the population does not have regular employment, a paycheck from the state is always worth fighting for. And the nationalist parties, permanently afraid of loosing their grip of power, can always find a little something in the state coffers to buy social peace.

In my second field site, the central Bosnian town of Jajce, the young and old alike tell me that their town does not have a future. Those who cannot get out and cannot get a loan place their bets on membership in nationalist parties as vehicle to permanent employment. In the summers, single young men and women, flock to the *korzo* to enjoy the temporary return of the diasporans, hoping to meet and to fall in love with daughters and sons of their former neighbors who now have Swedish passports. In Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, where I spent a summer doing research in 2011, young men sip on their one cup of coffee and sit around in cafes next to the Vrbas river, playing cards all day long, sometimes to make some money, other times out of

boredom. They break only to go back home for lunch, where their mothers await them with freshly prepared, warm meals and questions that cannot be answered. They live at home, because they have no jobs and no *perspektiva*, no prospects for the future. The situation is near identical “on the other side”: In Sarajevo, predominantly Bosniak youths also sip coffee in sidewalk cafes on korzo while in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of their baccalaureate study of economics. Urban middle-class youth has greater aspirations; in general they refuse to work as bank-tellers because they were lead to believe that a college education entitles them to something better. Those lacking in parental subsidies sometimes find jobs in the service industries; marketing firms and beverage distributors have a special interest in hiring pretty young girls to work as product promoters and *hostese*. In summertime, they balance on high heels and in short skirts, promoting various brandies and cocktails, entertaining with their presence the international visitors and the nouveau riche in sleek bars and lounges, the last bastions of the Promised Land called “the transition.” In the meantime, the jobless and underemployed men hang around the ever-proliferating sports betting shops, where they gather for conversation, company and the hope of earning something on the side. There are people who are so good at playing the game that this is their sole source of income.

While all this goes on, in this postwar daze, the public watches the polished, expensively clad children of new tycoons and high-ranking government officials, who run around town in fancy cars, high on cocaine, reportedly buying slim, glittery pieces of electronics with denominations of Bosnian Marks and Euros so large that most people did not know such bills even existed.<sup>7</sup> The golden children have become an object of fascination in opinion columns, gossip magazines and rock songs. It took a while, but the true winners of war have come out into the public view. Brought face to face with the tremendous new class disparities, many local residents wonder if the war had been anything more than a grab for resources, a particularly wicked sort of a primitive accumulation.

It was in this context that I began hearing a new family of phrases: “We have reached rock bottom” [*Dotakli smo samo dno*] and “It can’t get any worse” [*Ovo ne može gore*]. In each subsequent year of my return to the field, I heard such phrases repeated with more conviction, as if this time, the criterion for total collapse had finally been reached. Personal fates of people who uttered such phrases mattered little; relatively prosperous Bosnians who had aspirations of realizing cosmopolitan lifestyles may be the most dedicated ventriloquists of such phrases. Plamenko, for example, lives a comfortable upper middle class life, thanks to lucrative employment in the heart of the intervention machine. But even his withdrawal from all things political and escape into music, cannot help him entirely forget his sense of despair. A young couple I got to know in Sarajevo, with careers in the non-governmental sector, an apartment in *novogradnja* (new developments) paid in full by their parents and a cute toy-dog, sometimes take a dose of Valium before watching the news. They tell me, “Something has to change” and “What kind of a country are we living in?” Then, though on rare occasions, I began hearing rhetorical questions of new kind: “When will the war begin again?”

Phrases like these are not simply representations or diagnoses; in fact, they bear a limited relationship to the reality of people’s lives, and give misleading insights into actors’ intentions. They do not offer a prophecy or a prognosis—they are moments that bring into relief the clash between intransigently held norms and new political realities. These anxious, and at times medicalized ontologies of crisis feed on a conviction nurtured during Yugoslavia’s socialist

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<sup>7</sup> See Imamović, Emir. 2008. “Bosanska djeca idu u raj.” *E-Novine*. December 9. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://www.e-novine.com/index.php?news=19893>

history, that time itself has a historical quality. But when a world ends, the flow of time becomes radically disrupted. Time itself is out of joint; the present is, as Bosnian journalist Vlastimir Mijović once described, a *birvakat*. Birvakat is an hour [*vakat*] that is archaic, alien and strange [*birvaktile*]; it is a time of multiple posts, postsocialist, postwar, post-Dayton, post-hope. Following Plamenko, there is something traumatic to the quality of this time, jerked out its assumed trajectories, plagued by disappointments of postwar rebuilding and reconciliation. In times of “birvakat,” the language of crisis keeps alive the belief that this is a temporary, rather than permanent, experience of displacement. This obsession with temporal disordering transcends ethnicity, class and micro-geography. In the Federation and Republika Srpska alike, it makes young people reluctant to form their own families, or plan for the future. The plunging birthrates are the only thing—aside from threats of military veterans—that makes nationalist elites nervous, because they endanger the biopolitical regime instituted by ethnic cleansing. What is more, this newly disarranged postwar time stands suspended, just like life trajectories, constitutional reforms and up until a few months ago, the process of forming the new state government.

### *A Strange Sort of Peace: Post-Dayton Bosnia as an “Eternal Temporality”*

The Dayton Peace Accords produced a state with two entities, ten cantons, multiple levels of executive government (sometimes, up to five!), thirteen parliaments, eleven different ministries of education, and dozens of ethnically divided schools, all serving a country the size of the US state of Kentucky. It also turned the newly independent Bosnia into a site of massive, and in some ways unprecedented, international reconstruction and reform effort. The project of designing Bosnia’s postwar democracy mobilized all the major international governing organizations, including NATO, UN and the OSCE, and brought into the country soldiers, diplomats, experts and money from all around the world.<sup>8</sup> Per provisions of the agreement, a new civilian overseeing body, with the ravishingly imperial name of “The Office of the High Representative” (hereafter OHR) was installed to monitor, and if need be, *direct* the process of Dayton implementation. The OHR in many ways became the most recognizable sign of the international presence, and the presumed locus of its political power. The High Representative, however, answers to another body, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), the ad hoc committee composed out of fifty-five states and organizations in charge of overseeing the international administration of Bosnia (Caplan 2004). In 1997, during a meeting in Germany, PIC granted the OHR the so-called Bonn Powers, allowing the High Representative to “facilitate resolution of difficult issues” by issuing unilateral, binding decisions. During its existence, OHR has acted in this capacity to impose agreements, punish and remove uncooperative politicians and force through different means changes in local communities and at the state level. Despite of the inherently undemocratic and paternalistic nature of this office (see especially Chandler 1998; also Hromadžić forthcoming) many citizens of Bosnia, especially Bosniaks invested in the future of the common state, supported the presence of the OHR and its interventions.

Since 1997, the OHR’s style and willingness to use its “Bonn powers” to aggressively override political disagreement, or remove problematic politicians, has varied. But over the last

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<sup>8</sup> See Coles 2007; Pickering 2007; Chandler 2000; Campbell 1998; Burg and Shoup 2000, and Belloni 2007 for analyses of different aspects and stages of this intervention. For recent monographs on the role of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, see Nettlefield 2010 and Subotić 2009.

several years, the International Community began introducing a competing new doctrine of “ownership” (see Solioz 2005) that would return the responsibility for the peace process to local actors. This new philosophy, combined with the arrival of a new generation of disinterested and increasingly irrelevant diplomats, has put the burden of political resolution of difficult issues in the hands of local politicians. This dwindling interest and decreasing force of IC’s presence reflects also the fact Bosnia is no longer seen as a priority or even a great diplomatic success.<sup>9</sup>

When it arrived in 1996, the International Community hoped that the influx of aid, market reforms and rule of law would eventually transform Bosnia into a multiethnic European democracy. Seventeen years later, few political actors are satisfied with Dayton’s outcomes. Part of the problem is structural: Dayton’s technologies of power, which (to reiterate) rely on ethnicization of territory and administrative decentralization, have helped further entrench nationalist parties. These parties advance their power through patronage and local networks for the distribution of favors, jobs and resources, using the fragmentation of political authority and ethnic homogenization to their advantage. This arrangement also ensures the sustained electoral success of nationalists and the absence of large-scale political movement of opposition—both of which stand in jarring contrast with the overwhelming, palpable and well-documented discontent of Bosnian citizens. Much of locally brewed ire about this political situation lies with the International Community, which is today disliked, albeit for different reasons, among all the dominant ethno-national groups. Over the years, OHR (which also now also doubles as the high representative of the EU) has on multiple occasions set up its own deadlines for withdrawal, only to repeatedly change its plans. Today, it is unclear whether the International Community has its own exit strategy, much less a plan for moving Bosnia forward.

However, the IC does not bear the complete responsibility for the Bosnian political paralysis. More than a decade and a half after Dayton, longstanding but highly opportunistic disagreements among political elites have yet again reignited nationalist rhetoric. The process of constitutional reform, which is poorly understood by the majority of the public in Bosnia yet said to be necessary for Bosnia’s future and accession into the EU, has also come to a halt. What is more, failures of constitutional negotiations have led to renewed antagonisms among mostly nationalist local political elites. Over the last several years, the most powerful and politically important party in Republika Srpska, The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (hereafter SNSD) has taken a turn to the right. Its leader, Milorad Dodik, has managed to harness an unparalleled level of support and political power by feeding on fears of nationalist Serbs over the loss of their war-earned autonomy. Ironically, Dodik arrived into power with the help of the International Community who saw him as a moderate, compromise-friendly, non-nationalist alternative to Radovan Karadžić’s Serb Democratic Party (hereafter SDS). In the early 2000s, among voters in Banja Luka who were desperate for a change, Dodik was seen as something akin to Zoran Đinđić, the much beloved pro-democratic president of Serbia who was assassinated in 2003. Twenty-three-year old Vlado described to me in Banja Luka in 2011 how his parents had to hide their sympathies toward Dodik from their coworkers during the worst days of SDS’s hegemony. They cast enthusiastic votes in support of SNSD in the 2001 and then 2006—decisions that they, according to Vlado, later came to regret.

In the case of Vlado’s parents, the withdrawal of political support has had to do with accusations of corruption, (mis)use of public funds for various extravagancies, and the deteriorating political and economic situation, including especially high rates of unemployment. Despite these allegations, Dodik’s structural position and skill at manipulation have afforded him

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<sup>9</sup> For the impact of the new role of EU conditionality, on these dynamics, see also Pickering 2011.

near absolute control over all the executive and legislative bodies in Republika Srpska (a power he has also extended into the judiciary and the “independent” media). In contrast to the Muslim-Croat Federation, where multiple nationalist and antinationalist parties compete for power, Dodik’s domination in Republika Srpska has been streamlined by the high degree of centralization of its administrative apparatus.<sup>10</sup> What is more, the combination of the electoral success and the consociational model of power sharing, has supplied SNSD veto power in all the shared, state-level institutions. Over the last five years, the party has used this power to systematically sabotage various agencies, ministries and institutions at the supra-national level, in order to argue that the state does not work because Serb, Bosniak and Croat interests remain incommensurable.

This circular logic is as disingenuous as it is transparent; nevertheless, it’s been very effective in generating political tensions, and even some remarkable ideological reversals. At the start, Serb nationalist politicians considered the Dayton the biggest enemy of their constituents. Today, a new generation of Serb politicians exalts it as the war’s greatest achievement. Occasionally—usually during elections and or in response to allegations of corruption, Dodik publicly threatens to organize a referendum for RS secession, which would probably dissolve Bosnia as country. After seventeen years of nation building and billions spent, it is unclear whether this is a plausible, allowable or even legal scenario.

In 2009, in a news interview<sup>11</sup>, Dodik offered that Bosnia was a kind of an “eternal temporariness” [*beskonačna privremenost*], suggesting he was aware of the implausibility of the referendum yet was also keen to promise that the paralysis will be permanent because it is politically beneficial. On the one hand, the rhetoric of secession seems nothing more than a political fantasy used for political profit and distraction; on the other, it is highly effective in antagonizing political opponents. To the non-Serb public, this rhetoric is injurious and unjust, and has made Dodik the favorite person to hate, prompting the hurling of various insults, flickered fingers and slippers at the living room TVs in many pro-Bosnian homes. Croat and Bosniak politicians, on the other hand, seem pretty content to hang onto their profitable administrative positions and have grown increasingly skilled at reaching compromise with SNSD at the last minute. Meanwhile, international media outlets speak of this situation as the most serious political crisis in the country since the end of the war (Al Jazeera 2011).<sup>12</sup>

These matters of high politics, which many citizens of Bosnia actively try to avoid or ignore, have created a grim atmosphere, that has over the years engendered copious amounts of fatalism and despair about collective and individual futures. Milorad Dodik, regardless of sentiments he invokes among residents of the Federation, is not simply the arch-cause of Bosnia’s political impasse; he may be more productively thought as its symptom. While some ask why the International Community does not remove him (forgetting the fact the IC brought him to power), others are beginning to think in newly ingenious ways. A Bosniak professional in her early thirties, who was complaining about the since-lifted visa regime limiting Bosnians’ international travel, confessed to me in 2009: “I wish they would secede already so that the rest

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<sup>10</sup> Middle-level division into cantons does not exist in Republika Srpska, as in the Muslim-Croat Federation. There are only municipal governments that answer the centralized, and ethnically homogenous entity government. This centralization, and the term “Republic” give RS the appearance of a pseudo state, which according to the Dayton constitution, it is not.

<sup>11</sup> The interview was published on December 30, 2009, on the popular news and commentary portal 6yka, based in Banja Luka. See: <http://www.6yka.com/novost/393/Milorad-Dodik-BiH-je-beskonačna-privremenost>.

<sup>12</sup> The article, “Bosnia Facing Worst Crisis since the War,” (published on May 9, 2011, can be accessed at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2011/05/201159193434661514.html>

of us could finally live.” Performative as it is, this rhetoric nevertheless reminds that intense political fatigue at least sometimes can also bring to life new kinds of radicalized thinking.

It is in the context of this tiresome paralysis that domestic and international commentators concluded that Bosnia as a whole is a kind of a zombie state (Beaumont 2009), a state that is neither functional nor an organic community of people, yet hasn’t yet failed or died, possessing a strange kind of stubborn vitality despite existing in a constant deferral of its own dissolution. This notion, which I examine in detail in the concluding sections of this chapter, first came to my attention in 2008, in the context of a TV interview with Sarajevo’s most famous public intellectual, Zdravko Grebo.<sup>13</sup> Grebo’s own biography reads like a study in a gradual, but self-shattering disillusionment, common in these postsocialist times among liberal central European intellectuals. The tired professor, pro-democracy and human rights activist—who is rumored to have refused on principle the position as the mayor of Sarajevo after 2008 local elections—is nowadays famous for his mantra: we will not perish but there will be no improvement either [*Propasti nećemo, ali nema nam ni napretka*]. Grebo’s declaration, which acknowledges the state of crisis while simultaneously deactivating its explanatory (and its political) force, provides a jumping point to my own confrontation with this slippery, super-concept.

### *Specters of Crisis: a Genealogy of a Term*

The trope of crisis is a specter that haunts political imagination in postwar Bosnia, one whose longevity and authority when it comes to describing political, social and economic realities in this part of the world cannot be underestimated. The performative force of “crisis” persists even though few people can explain to what exactly is this term referring today. The running joke in Bosnia is that one never sure which “crisis” is being talked about, as most people have been living *in crisis* for over twenty years. An acquaintance from Banja Luka recently commented that *crisis* has become something normal, something to be expected—a word that hardly elicits any kind of a response anymore.<sup>14</sup>

In this postwar and postsocialist context, crisis has transformed from a term that demarcates an exceptional moment in time into something that describes the routine of everyday life (Shevchenko 2009). In addition to being seen as a constant aspect of social experience, when invoked, crisis also involves a passing of a normative judgment (Koselleck 1988; Roitman 2011). In postwar Sarajevo, and Bosnia more broadly, this judgment takes place through the opposition of crisis with that holy grail of (post)Yugoslav subjectivity: normal life. But herein lies a problem: both crisis and normal life are floating signifiers, two vast and unspecific notions that require further work to be transformed into concepts. I will start by considering their situated histories of circulation and end by pondering the place of crisis in the conceptual history of political terms.

More than a decade before the war and the international intervention in Bosnia, Yugoslav socialist intelligentsia declared that their society was in crisis. This crisis first became known

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<sup>13</sup> This interview was broadcast on TV Hayat, on January 6, 2008, during the evening news [*Centralni Dnevnik*] with Senad Hadžifejzović.

<sup>14</sup> Even during the 2008 global financial crisis, many of my interlocutors hypothesized (or perhaps hoped) that Bosnians would not really experience the decline as dramatically as most, given the perpetually depressed state of the postwar economy. This turned out not to be the case; One of the most dramatic results of the economic crisis was the increase in suicides of naïve and trusting citizens who agreed to be cosigners on loans.

through the gradual but steady slowdown in the rates of national economic growth and the measures of GDP per capital. The shrinking economic markers stood in jarring contrast to those recorded in the first twenty years of the rapid post-WWII reconstruction and modernization. Economic troubles motivated Yugoslav Neo-Marxist thinker, Branko Horvat, to publish in 1985 an influential collection of essays entitled *Jugoslovensko društvo u krizi* (transl. *Yugoslav Society in Crisis*). In it, Horvat attempts to make sense of the disintegration of Yugoslav developmentalist project, by analyzing the roots of the 1981 economic crisis. In his view, two distinct moments of reform, one economic and the other political, began the downward trend in the Yugoslav economy (Horvat 1985, 2). The first coincides with the 1965 Economic Reforms that put a stop to economic planning in socialist Yugoslavia, decentralized investment, and liberalized the market. The second step went in hand with constitutional reforms of 1974, which not only diffused political power, turning Yugoslavia into a confederation of republics, but also by that very act, further dissolved what was already a fragmented and uneven national economy. The 1970s energy crisis and the weakened ability of the state to control the direction of its economic development gave rise to unemployment, inflation, shortages, corruption, apathy and growth stagnation. In a socialist society, where crises could not be brushed off as routine movements of the market, Horvat warns, such economic issues were bound to become political and social problems.

Horvat did not stand alone in his dire warnings about the Yugoslav future. During the 1980s, various experts in charge of different aspects of statecraft, including political scientists, social workers and economists, intervening from an array of different ideological positions and political agendas, published dozens of books on the theme of “crisis” (e.g. Bolčić 1983; Županov 1983; Golubović 1988; Grbić, 1989; Mihailović 1990; Sekelj 1990). In 1989, the Center for Social Research of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia published the results of its federation-wide sociological survey on Yugoslavs' opinions on and assessments of “the crisis.” Sociologist Vladimir Goati concluded that although the use of term has become widespread, there was very little clarity even among experts about what exactly “crisis” may mean or imply. For Goati himself, a crucial marker of the crisis was society's increasing inability to direct its development in a desired way, “to control,” as he puts it, “its present and its future” (Goati 1989, 5). According to Goati's colleague Mirjana Vasović, the loss of this trajectory exploded many varieties of political and social critique.<sup>15</sup> In the 1980s, a set of political and economic problems became equated with a moral crisis of society at large.

In my reading, what made this transformation possible is the profoundly moral character of Yugoslav commitment to state-lead development. Anthropological studies of socialist Yugoslavia from 1960s and early 1970s accent the normative force of developmentalist ethos among the working masses. Works of relatively forgotten ethnographers of this Yugoslav period, such as Joel Halpern (1963, also Halpern and Brode 1967), Andrei Simić (1974), and Bette Denich (1976) demonstrate how the economic and social achievements of Yugoslav socialist state not only increased its legitimacy among working classes and peasants but also helped transform modernization and progress into an unquestionable common good.<sup>16</sup> While

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<sup>15</sup> Her surveys concluded that 46% of Yugoslavs believed that negligence [*javašluk*], irresponsibility and lack of discipline in society at large were the main causes behind the crisis. By contrast, only 11% believed that communist nomenclature was responsible for ongoing problems (ibid). One shape that this critique took is that of rising nationalist tensions. The 1985 surveys minimize the impact of these divisions, but historical record proves otherwise (e.g. Woodward 1995a; Hayden 1999; c.f. Gagnon 2004)

<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the only monograph on Bosnia produced by a member of this generation of anthropologists, focuses on tradition and ethnicity, notably among Muslims of Western Bosnia (Lockwood 1975).



opportunities to gain education, jobs and access to housing played a key role, access to consumer goods, leisurely activities and other material effects, provided powerful means of rendering progress tangible to ordinary people. Recent regional historiography in the arena of consumption and everyday life supports these claims by showing the effects of the steady rise of living standards on historical consciousness (Duda 2005, 2010; Hyder-Patterson 2011; see also edited volumes Luthar and Pušnik 2010 and Grandits and Taylor 2010). Ironically, these decades of upward mobility would create a set of criteria for “normal life” against which subsequent periods would be measured.

By late 1970s, despite the fact that rising unemployment and disillusionment among new generations grew to threaten this narrative of linear progress (see especially Zukin 1975; and also Woodward 1995b), such practices of consumption and leisure continued. These opposing tendencies suggest that the 1980s crisis, today seen as the prelude to the war, was by no means a singular or singularly experienced event. In many ways, the last Yugoslav decade was also a time of great political opportunity, tremendous creativity, experimentation, even hope (for this see especially Žižek 1992, also Ramet 1984). These potentially productive developments took place alongside nationalist rallies, workers strikes, inflation and shock reforms. The sense of historical conjecture simultaneously fed fear and hope. In spite of all this, there is little evidence that most citizens of Yugoslavia could imagine, much less predict, how the decade would turn out.

What made the events of 1990s so shocking in Yugoslavia is not necessarily the fall of socialism per se, a fall for which many Eastern Europeans, including the uniquely-positioned Yugoslavs, had in many ways been ready.<sup>17</sup> The shock came in the guise of a brutal war, which pitted former friends and neighbors, former “brothers in unity,” against each other. However, despite the atrociousness and uniqueness of the Yugoslav crisis, empirically grounded scholarship on postsocialist transformations suggests that deployments of the term, and its “social lives” carry many important regional parallels. Concepts of normality and crisis circulate throughout Eastern Europe both as models for thinking about relationship between time and experience and as verdicts on the state of affairs in postsocialist times. I will pay closer attention to the literature on (post)socialist normality in Ch 3; here I shall focus on studies of crisis that look at Russia and Hungary.

In her 2009 monograph, *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*, sociologist Olga Shevchenko chronicles the experiences of ordinary Russians struggling to survive the dramatic economic and political transformations unleashed by the fall of Soviet system. Drawing upon observations of her ethnographic interlocutors, Shevchenko follows the emergence of a “routinized crisis” both as a heuristic frame and a set of practical, if at times contradictory knowledges, which helped people confront the challenges of postsocialism. She insists that her story is one of “absorption and normalization” in which a “perpetual crisis,” rather than being something external to that community, “can turn into symbolic resource and grow to become the individuals’ second nature, a source ... of a sense of identity, dignity and status”(11). Rather than see crisis as an opportunity, Muscovites prioritized (and took pride in their ability to create) a sense of stability, to render, as Shevchenko puts it, “the volcano habitable” (8).

Shevchenko’s book zooms in on the relationship between the objective experiences of total, at times disorienting, upheaval and tremendous resourcefulness of postsocialist subjects in navigating these disordered times. However, while “crisis” is simultaneously domesticated and

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<sup>17</sup> For the analysis of socialism’s simultaneous immutability and fragility, see Yurchak 2005.

rendered livable, it also emerges as powerful lens for political critique. By pinpointing a different historical moment in postsocialist Hungary, Maya Nadkarni (2009) examines how “pre-existing rhetorics of crisis, anxiety, and cultural decay” proliferated dramatically during the 2008 global economic crisis that hit this central European state exceptionally hard. Although the financial crisis was averted, the situation afforded Hungarians opportunity to “renarrate the disappointments of postsocialism—whether spectacular or everyday—as urgent and exceptional.”<sup>18</sup>

Nadkarni’s interlocutors complained simultaneously about the loss of both the socialist past and the postsocialist future, broken promises of normal life, and the rise of corrupted subjectivities and social decline at large. For Nadkarni, such dramatic emplotment of the Hungarian situation did not simply offer “the repetition of Hungary’s centuries-old discourses of martyrdom, pessimism, and persecution.” Rather, they constituted a particularly postsocialist historical consciousness, which renders secondary the factuality of “crisis” and instead helps us reimagine it as “an affective mode of encountering and narrating the world and one’s place within it.” In this case, Nadkarni argues, rhetoric of crisis helped keep alive the promise, and the imperative of change, as a way of retaining the possibility of a different future.

And hence we arrive at the central aspect of crisis as a political concept: its relationship to critique, and especially the progressivist conception of history. This marriage of critique and crisis is the central focus of Reinhart Koselleck’s book on the “Enlightenment and the pathogenesis of Modern society” (1988).<sup>19</sup> Foreshadowing Koselleck’s later interest in semantic histories and temporalization of political terms, *Critique and Crisis*, offers an intellectual history of political utopianism, by locating its development in the Enlightenment philosophers’ attack on the Absolutist state. Absolutism, which grew out of seventeenth century religious wars in Europe, relied on a sort of separation between morality and politics, that had as its goal the preservation of peace and deactivation of the threat posed by differences in (what Locke would later term) “opinion.” The alternative was forged through the doctrine of *raison d’etat*, which made the prince the bearer of absolute political sovereignty, while relieving his subjects of all political responsibility. This act of privatization of opinion, of purging morality out of politics, Koselleck argues, was made necessary by the political imperative of the sovereign to preserve order—ironically in the name of the moral imperative of maintaining peace.

By separating out the sphere of sovereignty in this way, the Absolutist state inadvertently set the stage for the great challenge of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: a morality striving to be political. Crucial intellectual contestation of the absolutist *raison d’etat* surfaced under the guise of new philosophies of historical progress, which turned history into a form of moral judgment and first gave rise to utopian political imagination. The conflict between the crumbling Absolutist state and these new forms of political criticism, brought about the 18<sup>th</sup> century political crisis that culminated in the new series of “civil wars,” notably the French Revolution and the subsequent Reign of Terror. Koselleck argues that Enlightenment critics, in their hubris and hypocrisy, in their insistence to act on behalf of progress and morality and in opposition to tyranny, failed to recognize the destructive power of their utopianism.

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<sup>18</sup> Nadkarni reports two startling instances of this renarrativization through the Hungarian board game “Crisis,” which prompts players to mine and scavenge for the remains of a destroyed civilization, and the Gallop poll which identified Hungarians as third most pessimistic about the future of their country, right behind residents of Zimbabwe and Haiti.

<sup>19</sup> Koselleck, a former student of Carl Schmitt, belonged to a generation of postwar German intellectuals who faced the burden of the country’s embrace of Nazism and its horrific effects, as well as experienced quite directly the Cold War standoff between two powers equally convinced of their status as the last bastions of Utopia.

There is much that could be criticized about Koselleck's account, his love of crude dualistic oppositions and fetishization of the Enlightenment as a unified movement. But what I find useful in this conceptual history of "crisis" is Koselleck's discomfort with the forms of political imagination that emerge out of the critique of sovereignty produced by Enlightenment thinkers. Forms of eighteenth century historico-philosophical consciousness (of which we today are inheritors) tend to ignore political realities, including in the most profound sense that of human difference in all of its varieties. For Koselleck, political utopianism amounts to a radical depoliticization, in so far that the modes of critique it unleashes "transform the future into a maelstrom that sucks the present from under the feet of the critic" (109). The philosophy of progress, which sees history as an unquestionable movement toward justice and good, justifies political catastrophe—a total crisis—as a method of a resolution, all in the name of a better future.

This normative aspect of crisis is the key target of Janet Roitman's critique of the term, conceived as an effort to think Africa, "the continent in crisis," otherwise. Many anthropologists, including most prominently James Ferguson (1999), Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2002), David Scott (1999; 2004) and most recently Charles Piot (2010), have looked at the less than stellar histories and effects of circulation of Enlightenment ideals in non-Western, colonial and postcolonial contexts. Fruits of modern progress simultaneously violently imposed and held out of reach by European imperial projects, attained new power during the wave of decolonizations and national independences. Dreams of the bright new future dimmed after a few decades of hope, when the demise of state-led development and the advent of austerity, revealed that the movement of human history does not progress equally for all. Post(Yugoslav) spaces experienced this cruel fickleness of progressive history through the violent and tragic dissolution of the shared, future-making project that was socialist Yugoslavia. Hungary and the rest of postsocialist world encountered similar disappointments amidst broken promises of "tranzicija." Last but not the least, middle classes in the West are beginning to recognize that the desired upon future—even one of stability, if it can't be one of opportunity—is by no means guaranteed. As a consequence, the language of crisis has come back with a vengeance.

What is distinct about Roitman's project, in contrast to for example Ferguson, is her commitment to denaturalizing, rather than domesticating the language of crisis. With respect to her engagement with African area studies, this project began in with a 1995 article, coauthored with Achille Mbembe, which showed how the circulation of the trope of crisis becomes constitutive of specific regimes of subjectivity (Mbembe and Roitman 1995, 324). Her 2011 essay and future book "Anti-Crisis" is a reflection on Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis*, inspired in part by the proliferation of crisis narratives during and after the 2008 global financial collapse. Roitman's discomfort with crisis begins with its status as a "super-concept" (Koselleck 2006, in Roitman 2011), which inspires more questions than it answers. Through the term crisis, she argues "the singularity of events is abstracted by a generic logic, making crisis a term that seems self-explanatory." What's more, "crisis evokes a moral demand for a difference between the past and the future such that prognosis and the very apprehension of history are defined by the negative occupation of an immanent world: what went wrong?" She adds:

"Crisis is a primary enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge. Making that blind spot visible means asking questions about how we produce significance for ourselves. At least, it means asking about how we produce "history." At most, it means asking how we might construct accounts without discerning historical significance in terms of ethical failure" (ibid).

Scholars of postsocialism will recognize in this move a kernel of critique of postsocialist transition, a term that stands for a linear narrative of historical movement towards market democracy along with a set of assuming standards. When postsocialist states do not meet such criteria, or take unexpected twists and turns, they are seen as political and often also ethical failures. The problem is then seen to lie with the corrupted postsocialist subjectivities, underdeveloped institutions and atavistic behaviors, rather than with the initial criteria itself. Just as one cannot speak of a non-transition, we cannot speak of a non-crisis. Following this logic, I will argue, what often gets called a crisis, is no breakdown at all—but perhaps the logical outcome of the paradoxes of the very framework, which is said to be in crisis. My subsequent analysis of Bosnian political situation moves precisely in this direction.

*Geopolitics as destiny:*<sup>20</sup> *The Impasse as Retracted Modernity*

“The history of our present is that of a community whose movement consists of standing in place”  
(Ćurak 2011, 28)

The global financial crisis in 2008 exacerbated the sense of urgency and anxiety in Bosnia; but long before the collapse of Wall Street, it was the local political situation that unleashed the atmosphere of paralysis that Plamenko describes at the beginning of this chapter. Bosnian “crisis” emerged first and foremost as a political crisis; it was not simply unleashed by the war, but in many ways enabled by the terms of that war’s end. While Dayton may have foreshadowed future problems, subsequent developments, namely the transformation of international authority in Bosnia and the deadlocked constitutional reforms, made this political “crisis” known. Today, the ambiance in Bosnia proper can hardly be described as fearful or hopeful; rather, it is one of fatigue and resignation.

In the previous section, I demonstrated that crisis as a mode of emplotment and a form of moral judgment is itself a specter of socialism, linked first and foremost to the philosophy of historical progress which in socialist Yugoslavia took hold thanks to the successes of state-led development. In that sense, crisis is not simply a dimension of reality, but an interpretive frame for mediating the disappointments of the postwar period. When residents of Bosnia say that they have been living in crisis for two decades, they are not simply revealing the continuity between the past era and today, but also indicating that forms of political and social criticism integral to the prewar era remain dominant today.

For example, contemporary measurements of crisis in Bosnia rely heavily on the moral weight of developmentalist paradigm. During my time in the field, various political journals and magazines dedicated at least one page per month to reviewing Bosnia’s status on various lists that account for levels of social trust, population’s optimism, rates of unemployment, etc. They ran breakdowns and analyses of these ranking lists in sterile hopes that their critiques will be a call to action. In September 2009, Radio Sarajevo published a headline: “Bosnia-Herzegovina, by far the least developed, with fewest prospects, most illiteracy...” In this case, the ellipses at the end carry even more weight than the dramatic qualifiers and adjectives spelled out in the title.

During my follow up trip in 2011, I caught a glimpse of a strange graffiti in the old town in Sarajevo: “Africa, here we come<sup>21</sup>!” The graffiti appeared to warn that the days of Tito’s

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<sup>20</sup> The subtitle mirrors the title of Nerzuk Ćurak’s excellent political theoretical treatise, a monograph under the name of *Geopolitika kao sudbina: slučaj Bosna* [transl. Geopolitics as Destiny: the Case of Bosnia], published in 2002.

paternalistic leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, which brought African students to Yugoslav universities and Yugoslav engineers and experts to developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa, are gone. Instead, it is now Bosnia that is playing catch up on the path to modern history. The war may have destroyed Yugoslavia and Tito's legacy, but it did not take away the modernizing ethos or its hierarchies. Meanwhile very few Bosnians actually understand predicaments of African countries; their Africa is not a real place, but an unreflected foil for their own quandaries. One of the myopias to which Bosnian crisis gives rise is the inability to see the local situation as paradigmatic, rather than exceptional.

One person who is struggling against this common sense of exceptionality is Bosnian political theorist Nerzuk Ćurak. In his 2011 insightful and angry polemic *Izveštaj iz periferne zemlje: gramatika geopolitike* [transl. *A Report from a Peripheral Country: Grammar of Geopolitics*], Ćurak struggles to find a way for thinking about the manifold contradictions in Bosnian society. Through his passionate prose, he breathes life into the trope of crisis, understanding that its past histories of circulation have turned it into a recognizable receptacle for a range of burning grievances. But he is also aware that this term also limits the kinds of questions that can be asked about the present and the future. For example, he laments that as long as Bosnia remains within the framework of "crisis management" its *development* [razvoj]—that is, its desirable new future—stays out of reach (Ćurak 2011, 59). Desiring to be provocative, Ćurak himself asks: "Is the only thing guarding Bosnia-Herzegovina from dissolution the fact that it is already dissolved on the inside?" In posing this question, he acknowledges that this disordered suspension may precisely be the condition of possibility for Bosnia as a political community.

Unsurprisingly, however, Ćurak has no love for this new state of paralysis; in fact *A Report from a Peripheral Country* is a passionate plea for a new international intervention, even for Bosnia's transformation into a protectorate of the International Community, or more specifically the European Union. Hence, he brings me to the other side of the rhetoric of crisis—its connection to the project of international intervention in Bosnia. On the one hand, this project has involved clear imperial and neocolonial aspects, which have turned Bosnia into a space of exception (in the sense elaborated by Schmitt). It has limited popular sovereignty and introduced a parallel system of governance with the power to override local political authorities. What's more (and this goes to prove its imperial dimensions), it has imported into the country various "neoliberal" restructuring processes under the guise of an ideologically neutral, humanitarian postwar reconstruction (see Jansen 2006). On the other hand, International Intervention lacked the sort of cohesion that is often ascribed and expected of the process as ambitious and as grand (see Gilbert 2008). Anthropologists have sometimes described the motivations of technocrats and interventionists through the language of ambivalence (Coles 2002) and mutual indifference, a phrase offered by Mariela Pandolfi (2003) specifically in relation to Kosovo.

Yet as a rule, most citizens of Bosnia are anything but indifferent to the presence of international powers in their country; those deeply committed to the future of the joint state would wish nothing more but to see, like Ćurak, the IC take the reigns of the country much more forcefully, including use Bonn powers and purge political institutions of uncooperative

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<sup>21</sup> At some point I realized, it is entirely possible that the author of this graffito was referring here to the World Football Cup in South Africa, and intended to give encouragement to the Bosnian national team. Nevertheless, there exists a genre of discourses in the region on these geopolitical hierarchies where Bosnia is portrayed as regressing not only in time but also in these imaginary geographies. Regardless of whether I misread this graffito as speaking about this problem, the point at large still stands.

politicians. This desire for another intervention that would disrupt this destructive stasis is what enables the language of crisis to go on. The value of crisis is its seeming capacity to produce action. It is a form of stubborn, wishful thinking, a way to come to terms with the disappointments of democratization and the rising stratification of Bosnian society. It is a narrative that can explain primitive accumulation as an aberration rather than merely the beginning of really existing capitalism. Holding on to crisis, and insisting on an enduring state of emergency means not surrendering to new normativities that threaten residual notions of what counts as a good life. The language of crisis is a means of not surrendering to the normalization of *birvakat*. It is a way to proclaim that the present is merely a deferral and not a new permanence, which must be accepted.

Insistence on crisis as the dominant mode of emplotment of historical time paradoxically is not about avoidance of change or about salvaging the grounds of human life. In these narratives, the very figure of the human is uncertain. It is sacrificed to the flow of time. The idiom of crisis is a marker of a desire to be caught again in the cogs of history, to be what David Scott (2004), following Talal Asad, calls *a conscript of modernity*. It is the fear of standing still that is far worse—of reckoning while waiting, of experiencing historical time in all its enormity. The notion that this present today is the new lot for people who once proudly showcased the fruits of “socialism with a human face (albeit one that was subsidized by foreign aid and protected by the fourth largest army in Europe) is not something that can be so easily accepted even after fifteen years of postwar delirium.<sup>22</sup>

Crisis has its stakes; it has a value, and a role. It is an object of attachment and a source of livelihood to the few remaining internationals in Sarajevo, who were once employed in various implementation agencies, but decided to stay to enjoy the food, the women (or men) and relatively low cost of living. They now compile reports on the quantities of small arms buried in Bosnian backyards and basements, warning of security threats such reserves pose. Soon, they will start writing about the dangers of Islamic terrorism. It is difficult to say whether they exaggerate or see what this anthropologist cannot—but without doubt, they wish to keep their hard earned expertise and insight relevant to their state departments in case they decide to come back home and need a job.

I use the trope of crisis myself, as an entry point into ethnographic narration (Vigh 2008), as a placeholder, as a way to sell my project and to argue for the necessity of critique and political action. I confess I have often made crisis my shortcut, trusting it to be a device with powers of self-explanation that helps people see the stakes of political impasse in postwar Bosnia. But increasingly, I worry that crisis helps obscure more than it renders visible, and that it pays to pay far closer attention.

### *Inertia as Anti-Crisis*

In the spring 2009, I found myself outside, chatting and smoking a cigarette with Sanel Huskić, the then-director of a Sarajevo based think tank that was hosting a three day long series of meetings and conversations called “Days of Activism.” Both of us were depressed over the fact that the organizations present there, with which we were both affiliated, and which claimed to be fighting for the same cause, could not come to a single shared conclusion. Both of us wanted them to issue a statement condemning the recent firing of a talented and dedicated

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<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, this reversal is seen as a punishment, a payback for the deferral of revolutionary violence and the relative comforts of Titoist socialism.

persecutor who went after nationalist cadres suspected of corruption and fraud. We then tried to imagine what might happen during next year's national elections and concluded ultimately that Bosnia is doomed. And then Sanel said:

“You know what will happen, absolutely nothing. We will continue to float on as we have been doing for the past fourteen years. We will eventually become a member state of the EU because the EU does not know what else to do with us. There will be no change—just a steady but certain inertia.”

More than a year later, when the EU granted Bosnia the “White Schengen” status, eliminating the lines in front of European embassies that not so long ago stood as symbols of literal and figurative entrapment, I remembered Sanel's words. The EU granted this new visa-less regime not because Bosnian political elites put in place the necessary reforms demanded by the Stabilization and Association Agreement signed in June 2008, but because European diplomats wanted to show a gesture of goodwill and give Bosnians some hope. Maybe the EU officials even hoped this would soften the political stalemate, making new reforms more likely. Budding cosmopolitans delighted, university professors argued that travel may make citizens, especially youth, more interested in changing, that is Europeanizing, the future of their own country. Meanwhile, no one dared to ask questions about what happened to the provisions and changes the EU and IC demanded. When games take place on distant playgrounds, one thing becomes certain: to be a backwater of Europe is still better than to be some other backwater.

Inertia is far from an attractive way to describe a historical moment or a political situation, in so far that it lacks both the moral gravitas and the mobilizing force of “crisis.” But in physics, inertia too is a powerful force, one that acts upon the world in ways that are not always obvious, but cannot be underestimated. And it is, in my view a far better metaphor for the situation facing present day Bosnia than crisis.

Firstly, crisis implies the immanence of breakdown of the existing order. The notion that the Bosnian state is in crisis implies that its institutions are not functioning properly or no longer fulfill their intended purpose. However, Dayton institutions, predicated on ethnic autonomy, political decentralization and ambivalent international oversight, are functioning exactly in the manner in which Dayton conceived them. The weakness of central authority and the thin sovereignty of the joint state are the direct (although perhaps not intended) product of the Dayton Accords. The agreement that satisfied no one continues to leave everyone dissatisfied.

Describing the present situation as a crisis would also seem to suggest that political authority in Bosnia is breaking down. Nothing could be further from the truth. While multiple parties indeed hold power in postwar Bosnia, what characterizes the relationship among governing (nationalist and antinationalist) elite is their symbiotic relationship and shared interest in maintain the existing order. Even when they stall, bicker and accuse, they always come up with a compromise, often at the last minute. In fact, in a society as politically heterogeneous as postwar Bosnia, where even activists who fight for the same cause never seem to agree on anything, political elites may be the most homogenous in their behaviors, attitudes and interests. Members of the postwar oligarchies watch each other's back, taking a united front when government agencies over which they do not have complete control go after their members over allegations of corruption and fraud. Regardless of their orientation, they rely on a strikingly similar arsenal of technologies of control of their constituencies, including nationalist rhetoric and fear, but most importantly, various forms of patronage and redistribution, which have allowed them to completely penetrate social and political life. The tremendously large

administrative apparatus, which is Bosnia's largest employer, has also created a veritable army of middle level apparaticks who have no interest in surrendering their titles, contracts and lucrative forms of compensation. In 2009, the only thing that the representatives of Federal Parliament could agree on was to increase their own salaries. And as all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina know, officials share a penchant for expensive Audis, fancy office furniture, high-quality suits, greasy meats, colorful festivities, and the most undignified forms of political populism.

Crisis also implies that Bosnia is at a verge of a new catastrophe, which would presumably take the form of a civil war (or if one is more hopeful, of some kind of a populist uprising or revolution). But such a scenario, though not entirely impossible, at this moment seems pretty unlikely. Even some of the most dedicated and imaginative activists have over the last few years thrown in the towel, recognizing that “regime change” is only worthwhile when one has a viable political alternative. As for a new war... Given the resources invested in Bosnia's postwar reconstruction, it is doubtful that international organizations, as dysfunctional as they are, would actually sit on the sidelines and tolerate the renewal of violence. Around 5500 military troops are still stationed in the area. Those are structural conditions that make resumption of fighting unlikely. There is also the question of atmosphere among the population—beyond the self-serving nationalist rhetoric employed by parties and their leaders, and the ways it is aggressively ventriloquized in comment sections of online news portals, through social media and on discussion forums. What's remarkable about the postwar period, given the level and the forms of wartime violence and persecution—is the relative scarcity of inter-ethnic retributive violence. The great majority of the people who lived through the war cannot bear the thought of it repeating; they would much rather leave Bosnia all together than go through the same thing again. It is doubtful that nationalist elites would have much luck mobilizing these mature generations to fight for what many now understand are “lost causes.”<sup>23</sup> For the time being, Bosnia stands still.

Still, many questions remain. For one, what forms of community are possible under the circumstances described above? What happens to politics when the future cannot be imagined? I conclude this chapter with an experiment in thinking about this problem, one inspired by an unlikely ethnographic artifact—a sci fi cyber novel about a zombie apocalypse.

## **PART II: The Inoperative Political Community<sup>24</sup>**

### *Longing for a New Apocalypse, at the Margins of the Political Imaginary*

In October 2011, twelve months after the 2010 elections had yet not produced a new government, an uncommon new project appeared in the Bosnian blogosphere. Though in some ways still marginally relevant, the blogosphere has in the last years become a home to various forms of social commentary, nascent aspirations of literary authorship and even experiments in

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<sup>23</sup> Political elites know this; this is why they show such interest in pedagogical and educational institutions for children and youth. Later chapters analyze these struggles in greater detail.

<sup>24</sup> I have borrowed this term from Jean-Luc Nancy, whose take on thinking about the political I find compelling for at least two reasons. The first is his expressed unwillingness to surrender thinking about politics to a consensus on a singular program of “democracy” whose arrival is seen as coinciding with the end of ideology. The second is his insistence that a community arises out of being *in common* but no longer having... such a substantial identity, not letting oneself be absorbed into a common substance (Nancy 1991, xxxviii). In fact, Nancy adds, it is “the work that the community does *not* do and that it *is* not that forms a community.” (xxxix). Such an understanding of community as something that can never be presupposed, and does not rely on programmatic work or consensus, resonates with Ćurak’s formulations, as well as the analysis of the “zombie state” that follows.



grassroots organizing. Imagined as a cyber novel, the new blog *Antizombie: A Survivor's Diary* chronicles the life of a nameless protagonist living in Sarajevo in the aftermath of a new, and this time global, apocalypse. The story—whose writing remains in progress—channels vivid memories of the 1990s wartime siege into a dystopic near future, where danger, starvation, lack of electricity and running water are met by an equally familiar sense of boredom and futurelessness. The characters find themselves digging up hidden weapons, left behind by the last war, to now be used against new enemies, also ex-friends and neighbors. In a manner reminiscent of citizen patrols in the 1990s, Sarajevans take turns guarding the entrance to their buildings. They hide inside barricaded basements and apartments, scavenge for food in ruins of supermarkets, and warm up pots of otherwise toxic water to take improvised baths. The war has come back with a vengeance.

Traveling through the streets of the city on a foot or a borrowed bicycle, with a hammer lodged at his waist, the main character encounters a depleted, gray landscape, where once familiar streets and buildings dwell evacuated and soulless. This Sarajevo is a place equally robbed of its past and future, where memories of the 1990s war have as little sentimental value as the history and literature books whose pages the city's residents (again) burn in their anemic but life-sustaining fires.

This disintegration and simultaneous re-stitching of social and familial fabrics is one of the key themes of the novel in the making. Beyond its unmistakable analogies with the war, the narrative explores anxieties that have become in Bosnia a ubiquitous part of real-life, present-day obsessions. The author transports contemporary grievances and forms of despair into a new, albeit fantasized future context. The central trope of this narrative is childhood, both in terms of its ongoing impossibility and disappearance, and the ways in which the specters of the author's own youth haunt the futureless present. The book features a scene where a horde of zombie children, infected in their underground classroom by their reckless teacher, is ambushed at a barricade and blown to pieces for the protection of everyone else. The breakdown of the social order has also assembled gangs of underage delinquents that plunder and terrorize the protagonist's neighborhood. Even when, in a fortuitous turn of events, the main character becomes reunited with his childhood crush, he loses her because he has already given up on the possibility of a future.

Despite its dark tone, *Anti-Zombie: A Diary of a Survivor*, is marked by a strange kind of longing, even nostalgia. It is as if the story written in the foreclosed postwar present looks to conjure up a fantasy of new apocalypse, one capable of producing a world differently divided and made precarious in some other way. The author reminds his readers it no longer matters whether someone is Muslim, Serb and Croat; against the new calamity, past divisions have become meaningless and history is reduced to a set of lessons about survival. The only source of laughter is irony, as the fantasized egalitarianism renders obsolete past geopolitical arrangements: one of the first things he tells is that cigarettes are now equally expensive in the West as in Bosnia.

The author of the blog, Arnel Šarić Šaran, a punk musician, journalist, radio host, and an occasional TV celebrity, is not the first to stage a sci-fi narrative in war-torn Sarajevo. The first was Karim Zaimović, who left behind a collection of sci-fi fantasy stories set in wartime Sarajevo, before he lost his life in the final moments of the city's siege.<sup>25</sup> Belgrade-born French graphic artist, Enki Bilal, made use of Sarajevo's ruined landscapes in a four-part series dedicated to exploring the breakup of Yugoslavia from the future apocalyptic perspective. Like

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<sup>25</sup> Zaimović's fantastic book of short stories is titled *The Secret of Raspberry Jam*.

Bilal, who merges past memories with fictional future horizons, Sharan insists that his story is only in part inspired by Sarajevo's recent history. It is also a critique of the present, in its local and global dimensions.

Sharan's literary experiment has been successful enough to inspire plans of publishing the story in print; the book will be, to my knowledge, the first on the theme of "zombiism" in postwar Bosnia. In contrast to vampires, zombies have never before been a robust subject of interest in the region, nor a part of local folkloric traditions. Instead of in annals of folklorists, the zombie is making its appearance in the interviews with local intellectuals, and in texts of political analysts and journalists who write about contemporary national politics. In such analyses, Bosnia itself is depicted as a "zombie state." Such a trope bears resemblance to, but also expand upon the treatises on state failure, with which students of the Balkans are very familiar. Some of them have undoubtedly inspired by recent obsessions with zombies in political science, economics and IR (e.g. Onaran 2012; Drezner 2011; Harman 2009),

In Bosnia proper, the rise of the zombie as a figure corresponds with a moment of a qualitative transformation of the nature of postwar international intervention, from that happening in response to a "state of emergency" into an inert presence that adds to the sense of temporal suspension and perpetual deferral. Zombie's ability to remain floating between life and death speaks to the contemporary political predicament in Bosnia in ways apparent and subtle. As figures, zombies possess an apparent plasticity that allows them to conjure up a variety of questions and concerns. The complex genealogy of this figure and its multiple dimensions help explain why zombies have in recent years taken popular culture, cinematic, literary and even academic worlds, by storm.

Writing about Haiti and South Africa, where this figure of the undead is said to have originated, anthropologists have linked renewed obsessions with zombies to resurgence of witchcraft and sorcery, dispossessions of neoliberal capitalism and anxieties about immigrant labor (Comaroff 2002). In the United States, zombie's rise in popularity, among other things has been explained as an aftershock of the 9-11 attacks, the rise of new forms of survivalism, as well as to cultural anxieties about death, or rather its withdrawal from everyday experiences. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, analysts began to use the term zombie banks and zombie capitalism, to describe financial institutions whose real functions had become hollowed out, obscure, self-serving, shadowy and parasitic upon taxpayers and the economy at large.

Undoubtedly, anxieties about zombie capitalism and descriptions of the Bosnian postwar situation in terms of a "zombie state" share some normative assumptions about the nature of those institutions whose legitimacy is now in question. But the zombie as a metaphor also offers a powerful conceptual lens into Bosnia's unresolved political questions that linger nearly two decades after the war. Zombies are a relatively novel kind of monster in Bosnia, especially in contrast to vampires, which have long been at home in the Balkans.<sup>26</sup> Cultural scholar, Tomislav Longinović, in his recent book *Vampire Nation*, interprets (in this case particularly "serb") affinity with vampires, as a symptom of the projection of a retracted social and political modernization, and the anxieties this stunted modernity brings to marginally European, self-orientalizing South Slavs. Similar temporal transformations can be linked to zombies as well, even though this "monster" predatory nature is far less seductive and polished than that of a

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<sup>26</sup> Longinović is particularly interested in the roles that vampires and vampiric metaphors have played in the Serbian national imaginary, including the writings of local intellectuals and the representations of Serbs in international media. One should refrain, I believe, from inferring further that in the hierarchy of representations, Bosnians are zombies and Serbs vampires. Such simplistic analogies only further bolster essentialist representations of the national body.

vampire. Despite their popularity, zombies are decidedly unglamorous, and therefore the perfect embodiment of a monster in a context fraught by a sense of fatalism and despair.

Translating Longinović's temporal retraction into my own term "suspension," I focus in the following sections on the anxieties about the unfinished, suspended quality of postwar reconstruction, metaphors of half-living and half-dying, the bodies of the yet unburied victims of mass atrocities and their survivors, images of rotting, waste and disease, and the vastly proliferated fantasies of total annihilation. The usefulness of the zombie speaks of two parallel sites of anxiety—that of pervasive social alienation and suspension between life and death.

### *Neither dead nor living: the postwar body politic*

Present-day atmosphere of paralysis in Bosnia does not simply nurture despair and indifference. Protracted "crises" do not merely suspend lives—they teem with a different kind of vitality. Most of this dissertation is the testament to this fact. But in the last few years, the effects of the political and global economic crisis have come together to forcefully impose new forms of alienation and self-enclosure, even among those among the most creative and enterprising of my informants, such as Plamenko. Today, everyday discussions on the street and over coffee abound with metaphors and analogies seeking to capture the terror of half-living, half-dying condition. It is this inbetweenness of the social condition that creates a fruitful ground for the figure of the zombie.

Matters of death and dying play a special role in formerly socialist societies, and have so far been the focus of much anthropological writing on the region. This goes beyond the need to translate the fall of state socialism into a form of symbolic and real death (see Borneman 2004, also for Bosnia Bringa 2004). Social lives of dead bodies—both ordinary and special—have attracted anthropologists interested in reconfigurations of political authority, scientific knowledge, religions practice and ethical life (Verdery 1999; Yurchak 2008, also forthcoming; Grant 2010, Bernstein 2010; 2012, Jašarević 2012). But in contemporary Bosnia, one of the few postsocialist states which is also a postconflict zone, death and dead bodies possess a different kind of presence, far less abstracted and far more sinister.

When wars end, they do not do away with loss of life, but in some ways help this loss linger on. Thousands of families are still searching for their dead in the mass graves scattered around Bosnia (see Wagner 2010, Arsenijević 2011a; 2011b). Husbandless, fatherless, brotherless and childless women, await for the call that would give them the green light to arrange burial rites, which are said to soothe both the living and the dead. But often times, the remains of their loved ones are found incomplete; as the processes of exhumation go on, sometimes in secondary and tertiary mass graves, the families are likely to have to repeat these funeral rites as additional remains are discovered (Cerkez-Robinson 2009). Even in peace, life becomes one endless series of funerals.

For those lucky enough to not have lost everything and every one, aspirations about the future are haunted by a different kind of loss. Entire generations, mainly the middle aged Bosnians whose best years were stolen by the war and postwar "transition," are caught between a desire to recreate the velvety normalcy of Yugoslav state socialism and the paralysis induced by the apocalypse they survived. Members of this generation are most often described as useless, directionless, and emptied out of spirit and of initiative; they bear the nickname of the "checked-out" generations [*ubijene u pojam*]. In this case, the very fact they remained in Bosnia—out of

obligation to elderly parents, out of fear, patriotism or, as the cruel local tongues would have, sheer stupidity—testifies to their lack of reason and direction. They carry on their business of surviving in the multicolored postwar economy, performing ingenious practices of accounting alchemy to participate in transient but life sustaining pleasures of consumption, feasting and vacationing. To do so, as Larisa Jašarević reports (2012), some have even started to sell family tombs and cemetery parcels, attesting simultaneously to the finality of human life and the postwar economy. Throughout the ex-Yugoslav region, there are people who now live in their family tombs, some demonstratively awaiting death, and others *simply* unable to afford life among the living.

The lingering suspicion, to which an ethnographic observer is at times made privy, is that even those that survived the war are in some ways dead. Not simply because of the scars, lost years or the not-so-distant traumas, but because the war may have either expended or destroyed the very best parts of one's person. My interlocutors often wondered if their frustrated, rude, jealous and at times even conniving neighbors were those very same people that helped them—in ways small and grand—to survive the war. With horror, they recounted others' and their own stories about the loss of solidarity among people, about families coming undone over inheritance and real estate, and about widespread indifference to ordinary forms of violence and injustice. Not everyone has fallen prey to this unconcern; as I show in Chapter 4, the only thing that has brought Bosnians on the street in masses since the end of war, was a series of new deaths, that is by murder committed by underage offenders.

This rhetoric of social and moral decline often makes use of medical metaphors, images of waste and rotting. Svetlana Broz, Marshal Tito's granddaughter and a cardiologist who today works as an activist promoting reconciliation, once described Bosnian society to me through the image of a diseased organ that must be cured. It would be hard to find someone in Bosnia who does not agree with the ubiquitous phrase: "our society is rotten to the core." Given the cataclysms that befell their country over the last twenty years, Bosnians perhaps have the right to such dramatic displays of the various modalities of their despair. Inspiring such images of social decay are profound political anxieties about the shape of postwar institutions, distributions of opportunities, and fading potentials for a secure future.

The body emerges as a one site where such anxieties become known—particularly when that body becomes an object of intervention. In the summer of 2012, one of the biggest scandals was prompted by the circulation of a heart-wrenching letter written by a widower, who recounted all the inhumane ways in which his dying wife had been treated while she was dying of cancer in a hospital in Sarajevo. Describing the toil that a liver biopsy without anesthesia takes on human body, he wondered whether the doctor that performed this violence was a sadist or simply indifferent enough to not care at all. It is precisely this indifference, and the aggressive attitude towards human flesh, that recalls the zombie yet again. In the suspension between life and death, real and figurative, one faces the danger of mutating into a monster.

### *Of States and Other Monsters: beyond the Undead Leviathan*

I return now to the notion of zombie state and temporal suspension giving way to a politics of perpetual deferral. When this phrase circulates, the zombie steals the spotlight away from the other, equally important figure—that of the state. A zombie state appears as another name for state failure, a trope that as Nikolas Kosmatopoulos has recently argued, relies on "the imaginary of a 'strong state' as the ultimate solution... to perils such as corruption, civil strife,

and armed violence” (2011, 116). This imaginary, as the subsequent chapters of my dissertation will show, remains a tremendously powerful political horizon in postwar Bosnia. Kosmatopoulos invites anthropologists to not take such representations for granted, and study instead the ways “in which the trope of failed state is utilized...” in political discourse and practice (117). If I accept this invitation, I must then ask what kind of value does the circulation of the trope of the zombie state produce? And how should that value be accounted for politically?

The state [*država*] is a powerful, historically saturated obsession in Bosnia that cannot be reduced to aspirations of ethnic autonomy and national sovereignty. During Yugoslav socialism, *država* was not simply a powerful Leviathan that possessed the power over life and death. More transparently than in most of the West, the state functioned not only as the beacon of modernity but also as the main locus of life-enabling care and pedagogy, akin to a parent whose tyranny could be justified as necessary (see Dunn 2008). Therefore, the coinage “Zombie state” speaks of unrealized postwar hopes and some unsettling characteristics of the postwar bio-political regime.

Fragmented as it is, the Bosnian postwar state is anything but powerless and absent; it remains intensely interested in redistributive circles and ready to unleash its violence on the disobeying at any time. Its fragmentation is no longer mediated through the belligerence of the OHR, but through much more effective forms of clientelist redistribution (about which I will say much more in the next chapter). Following Janet Roitman (2005), we should not ignore the ways certain forms of state strength endure even in the face of its withdrawal. Furthermore, while a zombie state does not really help populations thrive, it also does not reduce society to a camp. It produces its own emergent forms of life, whose political character and potential is yet to be known.

Zombies are often decried as symbols of disease and decay. But to me the zombie also seems a strange creature of uncommon vitality, able to cheat death and maintain resilience despite its frailty. A zombie may be a perversion of life; but it is also life configured as its different form. The cyber novel acknowledges this through its evocative and wistful desire for a new reordering. The most interesting thing about it is that offers its audiences no saviors.

Grebo’s sarcastic remark on Bosnia as a zombie state was likewise uttered to highlight the resilience of this “troubled”—or perhaps as Nancy would say inoperative— political community, rather than its failure. If the models of political deferral staged by the Dayton constitution are the obstacle to fantasized forms of reconciliation and modernization, they are also that which holds this fragmented state together. Deferral is—both the condition of impossibility and the condition of possibility of Bosnia’s statehood (and if I may be provocative, perhaps the condition of possibility of any political community). Perhaps then, there can be something unexpectedly productive about the zombie, if we see this figure as a way of thinking ourselves out the language of crisis.

### *To Think Bosnia Otherwise*

During my 2009 fieldwork research in the capital, as I ran in, out and around town pursuing various agendas, people and events, I developed a strategy to make productive my frequent cab rides. Whenever I would step into a new vehicle, I would start the conversation with the driver by asking: “Ima li krize?” [literally: Is there (any) crisis? or Have you any crisis?]. The taxi driver would then offer a familiar stock of narratives, focused on moral

decline and the necessity of demolishing this postwar society so that a new, healthier one, can be built. But one evening, I came across a man who rejected my invitation to judgment. Instead, he offered:

“But you know, this is how it's always been...surviving, abiding, making a little money on the side, here and there, going to the Adriatic coast, buying that suit you could not afford, buying your girlfriend a perfume, your wife a nightgown, your children some toys, then waiting for the next paycheck and so on. Let people say what they say, let them lament the past as something that it never was...we will all make do. Only the devil is insatiable [*Nisam đavo da mi je malo*].”

Leaving aside the theological connotations of this man's words, his response to my question (indeed, his challenge on my very take on historical time and human agency), offered an alternative way of thinking about finitudes of human experience and other ways of inhabiting thick histories and disordered times. To acknowledge that labors of surviving and making do persist regardless of shifts in political and institutional contexts means to also reject the notion that a set form of political authority or even capitalism exhaust the possibilities of human existence. It is only when one steps outside of this view of the present as a site of an emergency that it is possible to see continuities across ruptures, and to acknowledge, that a certain sense of vulnerability and precariousness is a permanent genre of human experience, rather than an exceptional moment.

Still, the enduring presence of crisis as a mode of critique, as Roitman argues is “a clear demonstration that the grounds for resistance are typically devised on the basis of prevailing epistemologies.” What alternatives can we offer to this desire to be swept up by tides of history, to be targets of some new intervention, either by the International community or by new agents of pastoral power, which could put an end to the political stalemate and bring about that thing called “normal life”? What kind of critique can we offer? One option is to proclaim the protracted postwar crisis a fake crisis and demand as Benjamin (1921) would, a real state of emergency. But the hope for the swift action of Divine Law surely comes from the same place as the desire for intervention. Moreover, it seems to me predicated on belief in the possibility of resolution of conflict, of justice and truth, for which no price is too high to pay. This kind of utopianism eludes many survivors of the war, and makes me as it did Koselleck, very uncomfortable.

Another option is to surrender to this time standing still, and construct in it alternative forms of life. Something akin to this was suggested to me by Jasmina, about whom I write at length in the fifth chapter. Once an ardent protestor, by 2011, like Plamenko, she no longer practiced any form of activism, deciding to abandon her comrades after an ugly confrontation that led to several members of the organization stepping out. Instead, she became a member of a mountaineering club, joining many other Bosnians who have decided redefine their relationship with their country by exploring its peaks, forests and canyons. When watching TV news in July 2011 made this anthropologist want to take some Valium, she demanded over the phone that I turn off the TV and said: “Don't be a fool.”

Maybe we never were *not* in the times of crisis—in fact, the first “Bosnian Crisis” took place in 1908 when Austria-Hungary annexed the country and through its actions prepared the road to the First World War. I do not mean to imply Bosnia has been doomed for centuries, that

it is *merely* a playground of global geopolitics, or that it's destined to be a site of historical pathology. Rather, it is suggest that "crisis" as a mode of emplotment and a form of moral judgment may be a sort of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011), an object of attachment that is an obstacle to one's flourishing. If the finitudes of human life make crisis indiscernible as a concept and useless as a tool for inspiring political action, then it may be time to let this object of attachment go. And let it go in the name of a future that is neither guaranteed nor always conceived in the form of form of an ethical failure.

## CH 2: THE NATIONAL(IST) ORDER OF THINGS AND THE GHOSTS OF SOCIALIST MULTINATIONALISM

Every morning, around eight o'clock, Zeko<sup>1</sup> unlocks the heavy, barred entrance door of the Museum of the Second Congress of the Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), located in the central Bosnian town of Jajce. He begins the day by sweeping the wide, stone stairs with a disheveled broom made of twigs, in order to prepare to greet the Museum's first visitors. On most days, there will be only a few. An emptied, patched up ruin, disguised behind a stone façade—whose most impressive artifact is the giant Styrofoam statue of Marshal Tito—the Museum is at once a ghostly monument to the founding of Socialist Yugoslavia and a tragic testament of its obliteration.

The town of Jajce, which hosted on the night of November 29, 1943, the famous congress that proclaimed the capitulated Kingdom of Yugoslavia a federal republic, met its far less glorious destiny some fifty years later. Between '92 and '95, its residents endured two separate military conquests and concomitant campaigns of ethnic cleansing. Today, a mere shadow of its former self, Jajce is a so-called “ethnically divided town<sup>2</sup>” inhabited mostly by Croats and Muslims, administered by cadres from nationalist parties and privatized by a few select and politically savvy postwar *biznismeni*. Following a devastating deindustrialization and a series of crooked privatizations of state-owned enterprises, residents of Jajce scramble around, surviving on migrant laborers' wages, favors, odd jobs and remittances sent from family abroad. Those who had better fortunes or better connections work in one of the coveted public sector jobs. Even seventeen years after, local children attend ethnically separated grade schools.

Zeko's story showcases the kinds of dramatic biographic shifts and everyday struggles for survival that have become commonplace in Jajce and the rest of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. Before the war, Zeko worked as a cab driver, earning enough for a comfortable life and little extra during times of merriment and plenty. When Serb forces conquered Jajce in 1992, his ethnically mixed Muslim-Croat family fled to the Croatian coast. To earn a living, Zeko became a humanitarian aid driver, working for one of the foreign charities. During one of his delivery trips to the war-ravaged Bosnia, as an ethnic Muslim, he was taken prisoner and spent several months in a Croat concentration camp in Herzegovina. In the meantime, his oldest son, believing his father was dead, ran away and somehow made it back into the heart of fighting in central Bosnia. Determined to avenge his father, at just 16 years old, he joined the military, eventually becoming a fighter in the unit of foreign soldiers—the *mujahideen*, who came to Bosnia from the Middle East to “defend” the local Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Upon his release from capture,

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<sup>1</sup> At Zeko's insistence, and per terms of my IRB research protocol, I'm using the name he goes by (a nickname) and not a pseudonym. His nickname is a diminutive of “rabbit”; a bunny.

<sup>2</sup> An ethnically divided town is a term used to describe communities in central Bosnia and in some parts of Herzegovina, where Bosniaks (Muslims) and Croats live in some degree of political and social segregation. Administratively, ethnically divided towns belong to so-called mixed cantons in the Federation, the administrative entity that grew out of the US brokered Washington Consensus. Cantons have their own ministries, their own parliaments, educational systems, frequently different laws and procedures and so on.

<sup>3</sup> Although not knowing the destiny of one's family members is common in post-war Bosnia, Zeko's son story is quite unusual even by Bosnian standards. The participation of the foreign Muslim fighters in the Bosnian war is a controversial topic in the local media, but of growing interest to scholars of the region (see Hoare 2004, and the upcoming work of anthropologist Darryl Li). It must also be seen in context of their global movement across different war zones in the wider Islamic world. In Bosnia proper, foreign fighters were and remain feared and ambiguous figures, especially since some of these units committed war crimes against Serb and Croat civilians (for which Bosnian army commanders were held responsible in the Hague). Today, some of these remaining fighters still live in remote rural communities, as they are now married to (sometimes multiple) Bosnian



Zeko found his son, but could not do much to persuade him to abandon his newfound religious beliefs, which he acquired among the foreign Muslim fighters. A committed communist, the father had a hard time accepting his son's choices, and after a violent confrontation, his son left again, apparently joining the same Muslim fighter network in Chechnya. In the meantime, Zeko's marriage disintegrated and his youngest son became a heroin addict.

Zeko sought the means for survival on the grounds of the Museum, which stands for a broken but not quite forgotten past. He dotes over the building's temperamental plumbing system and looses sleep over the mold on the ceilings. Inside, he lovingly guards a room full of socialist era memorabilia. This room is not a part of the formal exhibition space, but something akin to his private shrine. Inside lie piles of books celebrating the Yugoslav people's heroic WWII resistance, or glorifying the life and mission of Josip Broz Tito, the president-for-life of the country whose name is written on Zeko's birth certificate. Zeko is and always has been something of an ideological hardliner, a fighter for the communist cause. Although an ethnic Muslim, he opposed and sided along with the majority of Serbs against Bosnian independence from by then truncated Yugoslavia during the 1992 referendum. Today, he is the most proud of being the go-to-man of the local chapter of the "Tito Memorial Society," and the local coordinator of the dwindling antifascist network.



**Figure 2:** The Styrofoam Tito Inside the AVNOJ Museum. Jajce, summer 2008.

When I first met him, Zeko did not receive a salary for this labor at the Museum; he even brought his broom from home, carving into its handle his name, as if to announce both his plight and commitment. Milling around in his bright red T-shirt, he has become an integral part of the landmark. He provokes among the town's residents contempt, sympathy and sorrow all at once.

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women. There is a documented history of their conflicts with local Muslim populations, most of who see them as unwelcome foreigners.

Most people suspect he is a bit unstable, or at least “weak on the nerves” [*slab na živcima*]. Some town folk would say Zeko himself is *kritičan* (in a critical or crisis state), someone whose behavior is in need of change. But Zeko takes pride in staying the same. Since his (Croat) wife left him, he has been living with a new common-law companion, who to the detriment of his judgmental and confrontational neighbors, happens to be Serb. But Zeko too is always ready to give you a piece of his mind, especially about the nationalists in the municipal government. Most days though, he hangs around the museum from dawn till sunset, waiting to make himself a guide for a rare visitor who swings by. For years, the one-Mark entrance fee he charged and the sale of “Tito” calendars and key-chains were his sole source of income. He carved out this space for himself through an informal agreement with the Museum’s director, who appreciated the labor Zeko had already done on salvaging the dilapidated building.

In the years that I’ve known him, Zeko has lost a few of his front teeth. When the Museum’s utilities were shut down in early 2009 because of unpaid bills, he spent the winter in the ice-cold museum, hoping to find a way to pay for an operation for his hernia, which he cannot afford without medical insurance. In July 2011, he had finally been given a temporary contract to maintain the grounds of the museum. This contract entitles him to neither medical nor social security insurance; upon its expiration, it makes his situation potentially even more precarious. Meanwhile, the municipal government, distributing favors to different nationalist parties, brought in several young women to take turns selling tickets, robbing Zeko of his major source of income while offering a measly monthly wage. Zeko wanted to be lawfully employed, for his labor to be legally sanctioned, acknowledged and authorized, but perhaps did not anticipate the violence of that law.



**Figure 3:** A snapshot of Zeko's bookshelf in the Museum. Jajce, summer 2008.

And so, Zeko sits at the site of a ruin, surrounded by symbols of broken promises of socialist modernity, seeped in wrath and nostalgia, waiting. He waits for his son’s miraculous return, for the permanent work contract, for his hernia operation, for the change of mayor, for a

new revolution and the return of the past era and its ideals. In a place where the local population gains access to resources and opportunities by declaring itself and properly acting “Muslim” or “Croat,” Zeko is an ambivalent political subject, simultaneously a product of post-war political organization and its petrified prisoner. On some level, he embodies the strange hour and the impasse itself. He suspects things would be easier if he aligned himself with nationalist parties who rule the town, but proudly asserts he will “remain ‘red’ until death”. When I ask him how he’s doing, he echoes the enduring language of crisis: “Believe me, my days in the prison camp were not nearly as bad as this today.”

What does an anthropologist do with Zeko’s devastating diagnosis of the Bosnian postwar present as being worse than a camp? Surely, given the horrors of the war and the steady normalization of the everyday in postwar Bosnia, Zeko must be exaggerating. As he sits waiting for the resolution of his employment status, existential and family problems, he almost seems in danger of becoming another relic in the modest collection of the museum’s artifacts. With his stubborn, “atavistic” views, which make uncomfortable nationalists and social democrats alike, Zeko may be marginal to the new political order. But his situation, positionality and very subjectivity have been produced by the world built upon the wreck of Yugoslav socialism, one marked by continued presence of structural violence, interethnic mistrust, economic precariousness and the collapse of state funded social and health care. As evidenced by Zeko’s story, this world at times also turns waiting itself into a meaningful tactic of everyday struggle, a way for the marginal and dispossessed to literally throw their bodies on the line, as if to demand through their persistent, unwavering presence the acknowledgement of their needs and very existence.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, casting doubt on the town’s view of Zeko as a mad reactionary or a crisis embodied, I use his poignant story to rethink political agency and consider the intersecting roles of historical memory, domination and endurance in the processes of political subjectification in the post-Dayton state. Through his and the stories of several other interlocutors, this chapter shed light on the disciplinary technologies of the new national(ist) order, which in the process of its postwar consolidation, faces not only the practical tasks of reform, but also the need to transform normative notions of personhood and community. However, as this chapter demonstrates, lingering epistemologies and enduring moral repertoires often clash with new projects of political reengineering. Longstanding fissures that characterize Bosnian society, including ideas about difference, rural-urban divides, and regional specificities, further complicate both the top-down attempts and the operational logics aimed at generating stable new truths and predictable social relationships. Differences in the interpretation of socialist era and its legacies come to color popular views on the possibilities of postwar present and future, while lasting suspicions about politics at large work to delineate tolerable forms of political participation, dissent and acquiescence.

On the most basic level, this chapter is a historic and ethnographic chronicle of the demise of a model socialist community, which looks at ongoing processes of reconfiguration of social relationships in the aftermath of a devastating war. I am especially, but not exclusively,

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<sup>4</sup> In his ethnographic work on the isolated community of Whites in Apartheid era South Africa, Vincent Crapanzano (1985) conceives of “waiting” as a type of abiding that makes known the fact that regimes victimize in distinct ways even those groups which they claim to protect and privilege. Because Zeko’s own position is neither privileged nor dominant, I have conceived of his act waiting in a different register, more inspired by de Certeau’s elaboration of “tactic” as a type of an everyday procedure that helps people briefly suspend the work of disciplinary power to their own advantage. For de Certeau, the crucial element of tactic is its relationship to time. Zeko’s stubborn act of waiting, amounts to a certain colonization of time. Moreover, despite his vocal disagreements with the local government, his waiting bears the mark of a willing submission, not resistance per say.

focused on present state of interethnic relations in the town where Yugoslavia was born as a political community guaranteeing rights of self-determination to all its peoples. Despite what happened during the war and immediately after it, the Titoist doctrine of “brotherhood and unity” looms like a specter above postwar Jajce where the local population is no longer unified or brotherly, but in competition for the dwindling opportunities and resources. Through attention to the new organization of ethnic difference in public life, I also offer a broader argument about how nationalism retains its hegemonic status and grip on political power.

Last but not the least, Zeko’s story and the historically specific context of Jajce also invite an investigation into the status of socialist past in the configurations of sociality and the practices of everyday life more broadly. The final parts of this chapter engage with practices of memorialization and celebration of now defunct Yugoslavia, both in and outside of Jajce. Against the backdrop of new state making projects, such occasions on the one hand point to existence of alternative historical and political imaginaries, which remain publicly relevant at least in part. But a closer, ethnographic analysis of such forms of organized Yugonostalgia reveals that valorizations and recuperations of socialist era ideals are themselves complex, contested and at times mutually contradicting. In bringing to surface the messiness and the ambivalence that is often a constitutive part of these forms of collective longing, I contend that scholars should not presume that these nostalgias have a ready-made emancipatory potential or that they necessarily provide actionable alternatives to the nationalist order.

I begin by providing a brief history of Jajce’s travails, and considering subsequently some of the implications of the Dayton constitution on the organization of power and everyday politics it has made possible. I then recount two stories of politically ambiguous, morally problematic and at face level disingenuous ethnographic interlocutors whose attitudes and actions make known both the successes and limits of political and social technologies aimed at consolidating the new national(ist) order. The chapter ends with two bus rides that take these questions out of Jajce and into a broader national and regional context.

### *The New Order in an Old Town: A Short History of Jajce*

Zeko’s hometown of Jajce is located approximately 160 kilometers northwest of Sarajevo, a distance usually traversed in a four-hour-long bus ride along the regional highway that passes the vizier town of Travnik, climbs the mountain Komar and makes its way into Jajce through the sinuous valley of the river Vrbas. The town itself sits at the confluence of Vrbas and river Pliva, which meet at its entrance in a spectacular 20-meter high waterfall, which local residents have proudly deemed one of the most beautiful in all of Europe. Indeed, with its cascade, its hilltop fortress, and a sea of characteristic pyramidal shingle roofs, Jajce’s panorama gives an impression of an enchanted medieval town. Tucked in amidst protective mountains and emerald green waters, this region of Bosnia has been settled, mined and consecutively conquered since the Roman times. The antique history of human habitation is rendered material most prominently by Jajce’s oldest and most peculiar monument: the still surviving Temple of God Mitras (an ancient Indo-Iranian deity) from the III century A.D, thought to have been established by foreign soldiers conscripted into Roman armies. The town’s name appears in historical records for the first time in late 14<sup>th</sup> century, in connection to the count Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, a Croat regent from Split who is considered Jajce’s founder (Lovrenović et al. 2008, 18). Hrvatinić recognized the beautiful hillside settlement, hidden amidst central Bosnian mountains, as an ideal site for a fortification. In the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Jajce became the seat and



coronation site of kings of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom. This period is the origin of Jajce's contemporary nickname of "The Royal Town" [*kraljevski grad*]. During this period, Bosnia's feudal lords built many of Jajce's most prominent monuments, including the city's fortress and gates, the underground catacombs, the Bear Tower and the Church and Tower of St. Luke, later converted to a mosque (and today reduced to another ruin). Even though most of its heritage was to some extent damaged by the war, this rich architectural history to this day makes Jajce something of an open-air museum.



**Figure 4:** A view of Jajce and its waterfall. In the spring 2009, when I took this photograph, one site of the waterfall was closed due to work on the reconstruction of the eroded limestone riverbed

Jajce's medieval royal glory did not last long, however. Advancing Ottoman armies first seized the town in 1463, but lost control when Hungarian troops pushed back from the north. Over the next sixty years, the area was apart of Jajce banat, a satellite of the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus, until it finally fell into the hands of invaders from the East in 1527 (31-36). Ottoman conquest brought Islam to the region, and diversified the town's architectural and cultural heritage. But it also reduced Jajce's political significance, as the imperial administration chose the town of Travnik as a religious and political center (37). After Bosnia became an occupied zone of Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878, Austrian and German investors began transforming Jajce into a regional industrial center. They laid ground for what was to become ElectroBosna, a ferrosilicon alloy producing heavy industry complex situated at the entrance of the town. During that period, the first hydroelectric plant on Vrbas was established, beginning the process of electrification. Over the next century, first the Yugoslav Kingdom and then the

new socialist state would expand upon these forms of industrialization.

Jajce's unique geography and history prompted Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav Partisans to choose it as the site of the Second Congress of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (hereafter AVNOJ). In late November 1943, resistance fighters from all parts of the war-ravaged and dismantled Yugoslavia descended upon newly liberated Jajce,<sup>5</sup> to take part in a meeting that would found the new Yugoslavia as a federal republic based on self-determination of all its nations. The AVNOJ delegations met in the very same modest room whose key Zeko guards today, amidst walls decorated by portraits of Marx, Churchill and Stalin. In the accounts of Milovan Đilas (1990), a member of Tito's close circle and latter Yugoslav dissident, neither the modest setting nor the somber news of death of Ivo Lola Ribar, the leader of the League of Young Communists of Yugoslavia (SKOJ), could quiet the euphoria and exuberance created by a two day long meeting.

Following the end of a bloody and devastating WWII, Jajce was recognized as the official birthplace of Yugoslavia, enjoying a period of economic and cultural prosperity. Elektrobosna and associated industries were expanded, and at their peak employed nearly 70 percent of adult residents (Toal and Dahlman 2011, 80). The complex generated a seventh of all Yugoslav foreign exports produced in Bosnia-Herzegovina; its smokestacks were allegedly the inspiration behind Bosnia's socialist era coat of arms (Brkić, Bahić and Čelić 2006). Serving as quasi-institution in its own right, this giant enterprise funded the construction of apartment complexes, football teams, hotels and cultural centers. It also caused great damage to the environment, making Jajce known as a place abounding in soot, smog and poor air quality. The town's ethnically diverse population grew and became more educated. A state-of-the-art hospital complex was built in the center of the town, employing a range of medical specialists and attracting young job seekers into town. Meanwhile, owing to its history and natural beauty, Jajce became the third most visited tourist place in Bosnia, after much larger cities of Sarajevo and Mostar. Throughout the year, groups of schoolchildren from all of Yugoslavia were brought to the city on their "Tito's revolutionary trails" excursions. In the summers, different kinds of visitors would flock to the nearby village of Podmilačje, and its famous catholic healing and pilgrimage site, Svetište Ivana Krstitelja [The Shrine of John the Baptist]. To satisfy the demand, a number of hotels, campgrounds and sport facilities were built in the city and on the banks of the nearby Pliva lakes. In 1981, an important national theatre festival was established, bringing into town troupes from all over former Yugoslavia to vie for the top prize.

Jajce's geographic location, multiethnic composition of its population, economic reliance on heavy industries and a host of other abovementioned characteristics made the town extremely vulnerable in the context of the violent dismembering of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia. Situated mere fifty kilometers from the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka, Jajce was conquered by the Army of Republika Srpska in October 1992, after a prolonged period of heavy bombardment and unsuccessful local attempt to mount a defense. At that time, most Muslims and Croats fled the town, sometimes escaping to nearby towns of Travnik, Donji Vakuf or Zenica, other times heading to Croatia, or leaving the Balkans all together to find refuge in Western Europe and Scandinavia. By the time the dissolution of a fragile political alliance between Muslims and Croats led to interethnic military confrontation, persecution, expulsions and all manner of

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<sup>5</sup> For an account of one such journey, see the diary of Slovenian partisan, Edvard Kocbeck, entitled *A Voyage to Jajce*.

wartime horror, most local Croats and Muslims had already gone in separate directions.<sup>6</sup> The timing of the first fall of Jajce prevented direct military fighting between Jajce's Muslims and Croats, its largest two ethnic groups. This was a fact that certain residents emphasized as the town's "fortune in misfortune" [*sreća u nesreći*]. In 1995, as a part of a military operation "Storm," which began in Croatia, Croat Defense Council [Hrvatsko vijeće obrane; hereafter HVO] managed to take over the town from the Serb forces and establish itself as the primary military and political authority.

Jajce's wartime experience had, at one point or another, made refugees out of almost all of the town's residents, a deeply intermingled population that according to the last census in 1991 consisted of 19.2% Serbs, 35.1% Croats, 38.6% Bosniaks and 5.5% of Yugoslavs.<sup>7</sup> Due to population expulsions that coincided with two different military conquests, as well as the difficult process of refugee return, Jajce lost an estimated 55% of its original inhabitants, who today live scattered around the world, with a large number in diasporic communities in Northern Europe. New Dayton administrative boundaries placed Jajce at the very border of the newfound "entities" the Muslim-Croat Federation and Republika Srpska. The uneasy alliance brokered by the US in March 1994 between Muslims and Croats, following aforementioned military confrontations in Herzegovina and Central Bosnia during '93-'94, was mitigated by further administrative division of the Federation into ten cantons, eight of which are dominated by a single national group. Jajce belongs to the so-called Central-Bosnian Canton, one of the two cantons in the Federation that are ethnically and administratively mixed.

The decentralization of the Federation was designed with the explicit purpose of granting a degree of autonomy to Croats and Bosniaks while preventing further divisions. But in practice, "cantonization" has led to mushrooming of overlapping and mutually antagonistic agencies, bodies and institutions, which are said to protect "vital national interests." Contradictory attempts to accommodate hostile ethnonationalist interests while creating something resembling a democratic rule of law have produced ineffective institutions and empty legal frameworks that have little hope of yielding solutions to problems (see Hayden 2000, but also Campbell 1999). Because of their complex governance, these mixed cantons and towns and municipalities they govern, have in the post-war period come to represent the immoralities, contradictions and absurdities of ethno-nationalist politics. What's more, a decentralized model of power based on inscription of ethnic difference into law and territory, has kept in power the people responsible for the war. Their grip of power became especially salient in small towns like Jajce, where the mixed character of the population and limited resources in turn create the perfect conditions for reinforcement of ethnic difference. Clientelist networks, party patronage, careful distribution of resources and job assignments further reinforce these divisions.<sup>8</sup>

In Jajce, in contrast with most other Central Bosnian communities, such political lines of division emerged most forcefully in the aftermath of the war, during the thorny process of refugee return. When HVO took charge of Jajce in 1995, it proclaimed itself the one true liberator of Jajce and the supreme political and military power. After it pushed out the Serb

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there are very few English-language monograph length studies dedicated to this Muslim-Croat war in central Bosnia, except for Charles Shrader's extremely problematic military history (2003), written in service of the Croat nationalist agenda.

<sup>7</sup> Numbers are cited in International Crisis Group (ICG), *Return of Displaced Persons to Jajce and Travnik*, 3 June 1998, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a6f08.html> [accessed 13 December 2012]

<sup>8</sup> There exists a growing literature on national relations in Bosnia based on ethnographic research, which illustrates the complexities of identification and belonging, and in so doing supports the claim I am making here. See edited volume *The New Bosnian Mosaic* (Bougarel et al., 2007).

population that had lived in the town for the first three years of war, the HVO militia took control of all aspects of social and economic life, putting up checkpoints so as to prevent the entry and return of non-Croats. In the meantime, empty apartments and “abandoned” property had been awarded to returning Croat residents who supported the newly established nationalist regime and Croat refugees from other parts of Bosnia who had decided to settle in the HVO dominated town. Some of my Croat informants who returned shortly after Operation “Storm,” note that women routinely raided houses and apartments abandoned by fleeing Serbs, in order to find household items, clothing and jewelry. In the meantime, HVO government erected monuments to Croat fighters, changed the names of streets and covered the town with Croat nationalist insignia. It placed unqualified personnel (often high school students) into jobs previously held by members of other ethnic groups, at times also firing local Croats who were in mixed marriages or were unsupportive and critical of HVO’s behaviors. The new government also began the fraudulent process of privatization of what were once state owned enterprises, starting with Elektrobosna, which was cannibalized, squandered and brought to bankruptcy by a group of some thirteen HVO loyalists, who were later indicted for financial malfeasance.<sup>9</sup> And last but not the least, to “reward” its soldiers for the hard work of liberating the town, HVO opened up a brothel in the nearby village of Divičani, rumored to have been staffed by Ukrainian and Moldovan women.



**Figure 5:** A dilapidated house whose reconstruction has been abandoned.

In August 1997, when groups of Bosniaks started to make the self-organized efforts to return to town and nearby villages, they were chased away by drunken, violent Croat men, some from the HVO militia (Toal and Dahlman 2011,194). These militias, and later unidentified arsonists, would continue for months to burn down houses of the returnees, reenacting a

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed account of the Elektrobosna privatization, see “Elektrobosna.” 2007. Centar za Istraživačko Novinarstvo. Februar 27. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://www.cin.ba/Reports/1/?cid=372,2,1>



commonplace strategy of ethnic cleansing which had so viciously characterized the entire war. After much stalling, the OSCE and other representatives of the International Community started exerting greater pressure on the local Croat nationalist government to allow for the so-called “minority returns” and “exchanges” of refugee populations. After a long and arduous process, which included a great deal of obstructionism, offers of reconstruction aid and the transformation of municipal councils to allow for the inclusion of Bosniak representatives, the return process was on its painful way. HVO government made it as difficult as it could for Bosniaks to return their property and former jobs; many people had to resort to drastic measures such as camping out in the municipal courts for days in an effort to have someone pay attention to their case. Nura, a retired teacher in her early seventies, endured a particular sort of indignity when she watched from a neighbor’s balcony a Croat woman, a HVO favorite who had settled in her house, take out and take with her every single item from the house which Nura built with husband, while claiming it all had and always belonged to her. HVO encouraged such policies and practices and justified them by proclaiming “We are all displaced persons” (Toal and Dahlman 2011,196).

HVO’s opposition to refugee return was of central importance to its ability to maintain political power over Jajce. Large numbers of Bosniaks in town would shift the balance in favor of Bosniak parties, and thereby undermine the Croat hegemony. Gradually, this very scenario played out, paving the way for the town’s first Bosniak postwar major to be elected in 2004. Since that time, Bosniak nationalist SDA has been winning mandates, including in the most recent elections in 2012.



**Figure 6:** The center of the town, next to the *Travnička kapija* (Travnik gate). Jajce, Spring 2009.

Today, most residents of Jajce vote for nationalist parties, even though the Social Democrats and other smaller, multiethnic parties retain their hold on an important faction of

voters. This situation can in part be explained by the injuries and indignities of the fraught process of return, which drove a wedge between Bosniaks and Croats, despite the fact not all Jajce Croats had participated in such forms of dispossession and exclusion of their Bosniak neighbors. In fact, many local Croats had tried to openly or at least privately offer help and support. Today, some Bosniaks from Jajce claim that uncultured newcomers and nationalistic villagers, and not indigenous, urban Croats (with whom Bosniaks had grown up), had initiated the most venomous behaviors. Despite this distinction, and even though no actual military fighting took place between Bosniaks and Croats in Jajce, these postwar conflicts led for a period of time to social and political separation, most powerfully illustrated in the case of ethnically segregated schools. Even though rapports among ordinary residents of the town have gotten better with time, to this day, dominion over certain institutions, such as the postal services, the library, cultural management agencies, AVNOJ Museum, etc. is configured on the basis of ethnic interests.

Yet from the very beginning, up until today, such forms of separation remained incomplete and contested. A number of my informants proclaimed that that Jajce *was not like* Mostar (the largest city in Herzegovina that was a site of terrible fighting and extensive postwar segregation) ostensibly due to the fact that no actual wartime fighting between Muslims and Croats took place in the town proper. Unlike some other central Bosnian towns where Croats and Muslims were physically separated, in Jajce all neighborhoods continued to be ethnically integrated. Moreover, material limitations stood in the way of realization of ideological projects. For example, while schools were indeed ethnically segregated at the K-8 level, Croat and Muslim children were generally placed back together during high school, because there simply were not enough students or funds to keep in place a parallel system of ethnic gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools. In the gymnasiums, Bosniak, Croat and rare Serb students, learned history from Croatian textbooks that focused on the state of Croatia. Despite these bizarre aspects of educational system, by the time of my arrival, both Croats and Bosniaks were frequenting all the cafés in Jajce, which had not been the case in earlier years (though to be fair, certain “ethnic” preferences remained).



**Figure 7:** ElektroBosna, in new hues. Jajce, spring 2009

Private firms hired workers from both “groups;” Bosniaks worked during Croat (Catholic) holidays and vice versa. There were also small oases of active interethnic cooperation, such as the Jajce Youth Center, which employed and welcomed both Croat and Bosniak youth, women’s organization Viktorija 99, Tito Memorial Societies and the Society for the Protection of Monuments, as well as some smaller, not as established organizations. Administration also employed a mix of Croats and Muslims. As I discovered in the course of my research, divided towns, despite being demonized by the media and foreign emissaries, produced unique sites for interethnic intimacy, which were becoming less available in the ethnically homogenized, non-divided communities. Moreover, as I show shortly through the stories of Zlata and Bogdanka, the proximity of “others” shaped the incentives and limits of belonging in distinct ways.

### *From Socialist Brotherhood and Unity to Constitutive Nations*

As evidenced by the story of Jajce’s demise, the bloody breakup of socialist Yugoslavia entailed not only the dissolution of existing political boundaries, but also a violent reordering of communities, hearts and minds. More recent anthropological scholarship on the Bosnian war suggests that rigid and antagonistic ethno-national differences, long considered to be an enduring source of political strife as well as the cause of the most recent war, were in crucial ways made possible by technologies of ethnic cleansing (Sorabji 1995; Maček 2009; Žarkov 2007; Cf. Hayden 2002, 2007; Bax 1995). In other words, ethnic intolerance, rather than an a priori reason for the bloodshed, emerged as its inevitable outcome. The arsonists who terrorized Bosniak returnees in Jajce in 1997, sought to finish off the process that a particularly localized trajectory of war had not. Through these and other persecutory technologies, the new nationalist government wished not only to transform the distribution of political power, but also the very bonds of sociality that held the town together.

While patterns of ethnic identification have a complex history, marked both by alliances and contentions, contemporary Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks face a new set of institutional and legal arrangements. The nationalist grid, its forms of belonging, modes of legitimacy, and claims to truth are not just a product of war, but of postwar transformations enforced through the Dayton Accords. The new political regime ethicized space, time and power, shifting parameters of political belonging and the very shape of rights bearing collectivities. Nationalist mobilizations of the 1990s had turned the mass into a collective political agent (Jović 2001), yet had done so by “demobilizing” significant clusters of the population that did not share the same political views (Gordy 1999; Gagnon 2004). This transformation also evacuated from popular politics any mention of class based struggle. Rather than bearers of socialist revolutionary progress, the transfigured masses became a reactionary force, serving the greater national cause.<sup>10</sup> The end of war and the new legal framework turned these collectivities into “constitutive nations” [*konstitutivni narodi*], adopting the awkward idiom so as to grant Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks equal status irrespectively of their relative numbers, and in doing this avoid the minority rights discourse. In contrast to the abandoned framework of class, or the never quite

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<sup>10</sup> What is more, the overdetermined national(ist) order demands that each and every political claim be articulated through the language of nationalist interests. Even the Opposition must first and foremost define itself as “anti-nationalist,” and in this cast sacrifice other possible axes of articulation, such as those revolving around issues of social solidarity, worker’s rights, or market based dispossession.

operationalized ideology of liberal individualism (see Mujkić 2008), constitutive peoples hold the seat of the sovereign, while their “natural” representatives can only be the very same nationalist parties that took part in the war.

Consequently, in post-Dayton Bosnia, one’s internal relationship to the state remains to a large extent defined in terms of ethnic membership; in practice, modern Bosnians are first and foremost defined as primarily Serbs, Croats or Bosniaks (Bosnian-Muslims). The national category “Bosnian” does not exist internally as a legal identifier, short from the passport used for international travel. Even though the Constitutional Court ruled in 1998, that all three nations are “constitutive” in both Bosnian “entities,” certain imbalances and contradictions persist.<sup>11</sup> For example, even though the Bosnian presidency is tripartite, with a representative from each of the three “nations,” Muslim and Croat “presidents” must be elected from the Federation, while the Serb must be from the Serb Republic. Jews, Roma and other ethnic minorities are barred from taking these positions, something that has recently come to the attention of the EU Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg, which ruled the Bosnian constitution to be discriminatory. These minorities share their destiny with others who do not quite fit the national(ist) grid, either because of their ethnically mixed pedigrees or ideological dissent (see Markowitz 2010, especially chapter on the census categories). This semi-disenfranchised category has been termed “ostali” (others).

These structural conditions explain in part what has come to be seen as one of the chief political problems in Bosnia: the fact that despite years of internationally sponsored reconciliation and rebuilding purportedly aimed at creating a unified state, the country's voters continue to give their preference to rival nationalist parties. Some analysts make the mistake of granting these electoral results the status of true measure of interethnic relations. Frequently, the dominance of nationalist parties serves as proof that political orientations of Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks (Muslims) remain firmly rooted in exclusionary forms of nationalism. Even some anthropologists, such as Robert Hayden (2007), argue that electoral numbers in the region reflect the “native’s point of view”—which is nationalist, rather than cosmopolitan or liberal-democratic. Acknowledging that uncomfortable fact, according to Hayden, must be a starting point for both analysis and scholarly intervention. By contrast, international “humanitarians” and liberal reformists in Bosnia will make abundant use of the same electoral conundrum to insist that nationalism is a form of false consciousness that can be eradicated through education, increase in political literacy, and confrontation with cold, hard facts (about corruption, inefficiency, poverty, etc.)

As I show in my subsequent ethnographic analysis, both of these views are problematic for a similar reason: because they reduce questions of political alignment, voting and ethnic belonging to matters of either hard-held, enduring “cultural” convictions or worse yet, of ideological indoctrination. Instead, I argue, one must pay attention to the structural conditions that make the victory of nationalist parties inevitable, and the micro-operations of ethnically constituted governments, which use patronage, intimidation and promises of access to jobs, opportunities and information to discipline individuals into becoming proper national subjects. Attention to the work of power in the processes of postwar subjectification also has important repercussions for our understanding of the possibilities of political participation in postwar Bosnia. I find interesting and instructive the fact that the charges of widespread indoctrination, lack of education or political sophistication and blind ethnic loyalties, emerge side-by-side

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this case, see the dedicated chapter in the dissertation of Andrew Gilbert, *Foreign Authority and Politics of Impartiality*, defended in 2008.

concerns about civic apathy and disengagement. This suggests that within the paradigm of democratization and participatory citizenship, only certain forms of political engagement count, namely those, which are thought to encourage a progressive, multiethnic, European future for Bosnia. Formal and informal membership in nationalist parties and interests groups, whose details and tensions I recount in the following section, does not really register as democratic participation in the same way as volunteering in an non-partisan non-governmental organization, preferably funded by Western money.

High rates of association with political parties in Jajce challenge the view that Bosnian political problems stem from civic nonparticipation in politics. In economically devastated and politically divided towns like Jajce, political parties became seen as vehicles for protecting one's interests or securing a more livable private future. But as I show in the account of the predicaments faced with Zlata, such forms of (justified) opportunism did not go unnoticed and are often criticized for failing to abide by a much more enduring moral codex that sees such forms of association as a betrayal of ideals and the community at large. Hence, in the biographic tales that follow, I demonstrate how the particularistic, ethnically based forms of domination, in the towns like Jajce but also throughout Bosnia, themselves lead to the production of ambiguous, problematic and illiberal subjects. These seeming corrupted, disingenuous, even hypocritical forms of personhood are themselves the result of absurdities of the post-Dayton state.

I proceed with my intent to complicate this view of nationalism as a "matter of conviction" by narrating the story of "Zlata,"<sup>12</sup> a young woman in town who was rumored, despite her repeated rebuttals, to be a member of a nationalist party. In the course of this move, I turn towards the processes whereby people come to enact, reproduce and make real nationalist frameworks irrespective of their values or intentions. In my analysis, the very figure of the nationalist and its occasional corollary of opportunist become an object of theoretical, ethical and political problematization.<sup>13</sup>

### *On the Ruins of Industrialization, One Must find a Way to Make Do*

Residents of Jajce, both those who remained and those who today live scattered around the world, have enormous pride in their town and its long, turbulent history. In 2006, under the guidance of a prominent Bosnian historian Dubravko Lovrenović, Jajce began its bid to be included on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites. Local government, business owners and residents hoped that such recognition would bring into the town visitors and badly needed resources for reconstruction and economic development. In 2007, the municipality and its collaborators from the Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments based in Sarajevo submitted the required documentation for the nomination process. Throughout my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, the possibility of UNESCO approval was on the minds of many organizations, businesses and individuals, who seemed certain not only of the positive response but also of the promise of development and the validity of the very idea of seeking such recognition. Only rare dissenting voices demanded to know whether such a status would place new economic pressures on the revenue poor municipality and its residents. In the spring 2009,

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<sup>12</sup> The names of informants and other identifying markers have been changed to protect confidentiality.

<sup>13</sup> The same kind of a claim could be made for the figure out the "antinationalist." In that sense, I fold mine into Stef Jansen's argument (2005) that nationalism as well as antinationalism form sets of discursive practices that become enacted by but also remain unevenly available to different people.



the expert ICOMOS commission of UNESCO responded with a two-part document, which denied Jajce's petition. While the second part of the report focused on the problems with municipal building codes, insufficiently advanced reconstruction effort, unsatisfactory urban plans, documentation and other technical issues, the first dealt a devastating blow to the local patriots by proclaiming that Jajce did not deserve to be listed because it had only a "moderate regional significance."<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 8:** Tower of St. Luke from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This is one of the monuments emphasized in Jajce's bid for the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List

The news angered and saddened many *Jajčani*, who placed their hopes for the town's postwar development on the process of UNESCO recognition. The debacle laid bare the pervasive fears that Jajce, despite its natural resources, beauty and rich historical heritage, had no economic future and was destined to become a dying town. When I first arrived to conduct research, many interlocutors would scuff at my inquiries about their expectations for things to come, proclaiming that their town had no prospects and that they themselves had abandoned all hope. One time, during a meeting of Jajce Academic Club (a group of senior, and mostly retired residents of Jajce who used to work as professionals, doctors, professors and distinguished

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<sup>14</sup> Despite this negative assessment of the initial nomination documentation, Jajce remains on the tentative list for UNESCO. Sources close to this process told me in 2009 that the reason for rejection was poorly prepared documentation and overly ambitious line of argumentation, which instead on focusing on one or two criteria warranting Jajce's acceptance, pursued five or six. Since my last visit in 2011, the UNESCO euphoria has visibly quieted down.

community leaders), Slavko, a retired engineer from Elektrobosna summed up his vision of the future by saying, decidedly un-ironically, “That Jajce be again just like it used to be!”

But these past glories of Jajce mattered less and less in the precarious present. Taiba, a sixty something native of Jajce who was trying to start up a business to sell her beautiful, handmade, ethno-inspired dresses, once told me: “Sometimes I think all of this happened to us because we used to live so well.” Taiba’s heartbreaking words suggested that prosperity was a privilege, not a guarantee, and one that was in a limited supply. Other residents of Jajce did not put things quite declaratively, but their actions spoke louder than words. Most of the year, the town was half empty, its many locked-down apartments waiting for their owners to return from elsewhere to spend in Jajce their short vacations or in some cases, a few summer weekends. Many of Jajce’s young residents never came back after attending universities in Zagreb, Sarajevo or other university towns in Bosnia. Those who decided to return were in the end faced with a choice: leave again, looking for better prospects in a larger, more economically vibrant city or do anything in their power to secure a more permanent employment. It is in context of this futurelessness that I introduce my interactions with Zlata.

One snowy February morning in 2009, after seesawing on a small brown bus for over a half an hour, I made my way to a village in the area of Nolutka, a vast uphill region adjacent to Jajce, which is home to approximately dozen villages. I journeyed up the hill and through the thick snow to meet my new friend and informant, “Zlata,”<sup>15</sup> a land surveyor in her mid-twenties, who was working in the field. At that time, Zlata was an employee of the local government agency; on this particular day, upon learning I had not spent much time in the villages, she had invited me to tag along while she was doing some inspections. On the way back to the town, she began telling me how fortunate she felt to get this job after returning to her hometown with a college degree earned in the capital city. She proudly recounted to me that at the time of her applying for the position, she was the only candidate with the degree specified in the job announcement. This unique convergence of circumstance helped her secure a coveted government job that provided security and a guaranteed paycheck not many of her neighbors could boast in the declining town economy.

My contact with Zlata provided me with a unique perspective on the political life of the town I was studying that had over the course of the previous 20 years gone from being a symbolic heartland of Yugoslav socialism to becoming one of Bosnia’s infamous ethnically divided communities. After returning to their hometown from impoverished exiles, people like Zlata had to make a life amidst these ruins and according to new rules of the game. During the initial postwar period, Zlata’s family faced the typically unfriendly and unyielding postwar government controlled by the HVO and Croat nationalist party HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica—Croatian democratic community).<sup>16</sup> It took them a few years to prepare the grounds for return. At that time, Zlata moved to another town in pursuit of her college education.

Over the next several years, in light of pressures exerted by international overseeing organizations, the population of returnees grew and political and demographic balance shifted. These changes coincided with Zlata’s decision to return and build a life in Jajce. In 2004, Jajce elected its first postwar Bosniak mayor, paving way for greater representation of Bosniaks in

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<sup>15</sup> Some aspects of this biography have been fictionalized, in order to protect confidentiality and prevent any backlash against “Zlata.”

<sup>16</sup> Owing to the postwar factionalism within dominant political parties (which has brought into existence a number of new parties, both nationalist and “social-democratic”), there are now two HDZs in Bosnia-Herzegovina: HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990.

political life and fueling hopes of greater economic opportunities. Those were slow to come. When I arrived in the fall of 2008, many of my new interlocutors were chronically unemployed, underemployed or chasing various seasonal jobs. Often times, entire families lived of a single modest salary or pension. That October, the town was also “recovering” from another round of local elections, which gave another mandate to the old mayor, Nisvet Hrnjić, a cadre of the largest Bosniak nationalist party, the SDA (Stranka demokratske akcije: Party of Democratic Action).<sup>17</sup> His reelection was not without controversy. Many people I talked to in those early weeks said very critical things about Hrnjić’s penchant for favoring his kin and neighbors in distributing resources, jobs and perks. Such criticism was widespread among Bosniaks, some of whom confided in me that they personally preferred the Croat candidate as an individual but chose to invalidate their ballots rather than vote for a Croat nationalist party that had victimized them.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, when it came to the ballot box, residents of Jajce, as many other citizens of Bosnia I talked to during my fieldwork, did not simply “vote for” candidates but engaged in many other alternative practices including “voting against,” partial voting, ballot invalidation, drawing and writing profanities on the ballot, adding names of absurd candidates and so on.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it was thanks to Zlata that I first learned of various types of organized political intimidation in town, such as that of “terrain teams”—pairs of nationalist parties’ members who paid townspeople “reminder visits” on election day. Other informants later supplemented such allegations with their own stories about voter intimidation and petty, post-electoral acts of punishments directed at those neighborhoods that did not vote in favor of Hrnjić.

It was through such insights and stories that I began to question the tacit link between the continued electoral successes of nationalist parties and questions of political convictions among the town’s residents. But a few weeks after my visit to the villages, I mentioned Zlata’s employment history casually in a conversation with a mutual friend, who quickly declared that Zlata had gotten her position not on account of her qualifications, but as a member of the SDA, which had just secured a majority in the town council. I protested at this accusation, explaining that Zlata already told me she did not belong to any political party, and had expressed views that in my mind made her SDA affiliation unlikely. Nevertheless, my friend insisted that Zlata was lying to me and everyone else, concealing her party affiliation from the public, because she wanted to eschew criticism. Still what remained implicit in his allegation was that Zlata’s alleged reluctance to admit where she stood in relation to SDA testified to the fact such an affiliation *posed a problem* in this context. Her affiliation was frowned upon irrespectively of whether the primary motivator was personal concordance with SDA’s political program and nationalist ideology or opportunism. Notably, my interlocutors in Jajce often conflated the figure of a nationalist with that of an opportunist, underlining the fact that both orientations were morally compromising, socially undesirable and seemingly constitutive of each other.

Over the next few days, I asked several of my other informants whether they thought Zlata belonged to the SDA, and all of them told me that she was almost certainly an affiliate,

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<sup>17</sup> In 2008, the mayor won 52% of the vote as a representative of the coalition of Bosniak nationalist parties, headed by his own party, the SDA. His opponent, the representative of Croat coalition lead by HDZ BIH won 44% of votes. Even though SDA received the largest number of votes, it still had to form a government with the Croat nationalists, Social Democrats and a few other, smaller Bosniak parties. The municipal government functions on the account of this delicate balance.

<sup>18</sup> Some of my Bosniak interlocutors were under the impression that HDZ pressured their candidate to be more assertively nationalist in his message, so as to ensure the support of his Croat base.

<sup>19</sup> These practices are familiar to anthropologists working in many postsocialist and postcolonial contexts, and have gotten some public attention in the press (recent example of Russia). These alternative forms of voting that have been sprouting up across the globe can perhaps serve as a starting point for thinking critically about the limits of formal politics in the contemporary era.



citing as evidence her job and her allegedly close working relationship with the nationalist mayor. Zlata's structural position and the work she was doing provided all the necessary proof for turning a rumor into fact; in this context holding a public sector job was understood to be the ultimate index of one's political affiliation. But there were other things to consider as well: one informant told me Zlata herself was a member of one of those terrain teams formed to "encourage" people to vote. In light of these conversations, I began to wonder whether Zlata was to be trusted as an ethnographic interlocutor. When I eventually asked her about all this, she briefly denied the rumors, and quickly changed the subject. A few subsequent interactions around this topic produced more doubt over whether my informant was indeed concealing a part of the story. To this day, I cannot say with certainty whether or not Zlata—at this particular time—had been telling the truth in rebutting others' accusations.<sup>20</sup>

But I pause with reason on the case of this puzzling ethnographic interlocutor, less to ascertain whether or not she was deceiving me<sup>21</sup>, and more to consider what her ambiguous situation may help us understand about the conditions under which one comes into being as a political subject in post-war Bosnia. While thinking through Zlata's unclear position with respect to SDA, and everyone else's investment in resolving it, I insist that something is lost in assuming that a person's nationalist (or otherwise political) stance is simply a reflection of personal conviction and intention. As these forms of interiority remain both publicly inaccessible and possibly also internally fraught with inconsistencies, it may be more productive to study political positionality in terms of what people actually do and how their actions are interpreted in the given context. My informants evaluated political stance of others in terms of concrete behaviors; these behaviors in turn made sense only in relation to structural position of these persons in the context defined by nationalist political power. The conscripting, disciplining character of this context which sets the conditions of possibility for action often remains invisible to those who believe loyalty to nationalist elites is a product of indoctrination, trans-historical group attributes and deeply held beliefs (which may be seen as either justifiable or irrational).

Hence, my focus on Zlata is meant as a response to many of my interlocutors in Sarajevo, who blamed the population "in the provinces" for the continued electoral victories of incompetent and corrupt nationalist parties. These self-righteous antinationalist progressives often remained blind to power dimensions of political life in towns like Jajce. While underscoring alleged political ignorance, lack of sophistication and inherent nationalism of these "provincial," small-town populations, Sarajevans were ignoring the distinct ways in which these spatialized communities were shaped by exercises of power. Ironically, the nationalist grid and the redistributive networks I describe here also operate in the capital. Access to high-ranking positions in business, government, higher education and many other fields in the capital is also tied to party membership or protection. However, as the largest and most prosperous city,

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<sup>20</sup> And as I will subsequently argue, whether or not she was lying or being truthful made little difference.

<sup>21</sup> In framing my focus in this way, I sidestep for a moment the conventional methodological debates regarding claims of objectivity and validity, which also form a part of my ethnographic puzzle about an informant that may not be telling the truth. I follow Charles Briggs (1986) in arguing that focusing only on such concerns tends to obscure the inherent dialogical, relational and contextual character of ethnographic encounters. The only thing I learned for certain during my fieldwork, was that uncertainty was a constitutive part of doing research, not only because—to deploy the language of Erving Goffman (1990 [1959])—my informants would put up fronts, attempt to mislead me or evade my questions, but also because they themselves were hesitant, self-contradicting and unsure about their claims or outcomes of their actions. So, instead of becoming alarmed over the possible "corruption" of my ethnographic interlocutor (a figure invested among anthropologists still with a great deal of significance, desire and hope) I confess I secretly relished in the possibilities this mystery could provide for thinking through methodological and epistemological problems. What made Zlata interesting to me, moreover, was the fact that I did not seem to be the only person she was willingly deceiving. If she was indeed lying, she was lying to the entire town.

Sarajevo simultaneously seems to offer more opportunities to create lives outside of these networks, making urban elites less cognizant of the economic and social constraints in small communities.

I want to resist the urge to label Zlata *merely* an opportunist, and suggest instead that her ambiguity is both a reflection and a product of unfinished consolidation of nationalist order of things and people. With that point in mind, in what follows, I show how some forms of uncertainty create ambiguous forms of politics and personhoods that are at once sites of surrender and room for maneuver in modern day Bosnia. By focusing on Zlata and the rumors that followed her, I provide a more analytically rigorous view of how some residents of postwar Bosnia negotiate limits and possibilities of political belonging. Ultimately, I seek to both problematize the notion of the “native’s point of view” and facile representations of Bosnian political subjectivities as completely caught within the matrices of “old” and “new” nationalisms.

### *Ambiguous Subjects, Questionable Motives: The Ethics of Being an Opportunist*

Although wartime and postwar experiences dramatically altered political and social conditions in Jajce, individual actions also remained subject to long standing ideas about how one ought to act in relation to the realm of official politics. Such normative understandings of proper forms of personhood, I argue, are not only a product of unique socialist era histories but are also at the heart of discussions surrounding Zlata’s alleged affiliation with the Bosniak nationalist party. In the Bosnian context, the act of entering the realm of official politics tends to be seen as abandonment of personal ethics and a resignation to becoming a jaded and morally corrupted subject—a point well captured by Elissa Helms’s (2007) discussion of Bosnian politics through the metaphor of the whore. What is more, entering a nationalist party that was seen as responsible for the ongoing political crisis meant one was not only abandoning moral values, but doing it either out of nationalist conviction or opportunistic desires. In the context of post-war Jajce, such decisions were scrutinized with particular force, given the robust presence of nationalist parties in everyday life and the forms of intimacy characteristic of a small town. Upon my arrival, many residents of Jajce told me that yes, indeed, Jajce was a divided town: divided by the line between those who had a party membership and those who did not.<sup>22</sup>

Some older residents were particularly worried about recruitment of the town’s young people into these parties, a process they felt had already begun by placing children in ethnically exclusive or divided schools where they were learning languages, literatures and histories as defined by nationalistic interests. Their fears rendered visible the existence of surviving ethical sensibilities that had been shaped by a different era and politics of difference particularly significant in Jajce, which had been something of a social experiment in implementation of the doctrine of “brotherhood and unity.” Despite the violence of war, most residents of Jajce remembered the Yugoslav period fondly; many also lamented the destruction of interethnic trust that had helped make possible “a shared life” [*zajednički život*]. As a consequence, being (seen

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<sup>22</sup> In a personal correspondence, Elissa Helms reports that her informants in Zenica often talked about whether or not someone was in a political party, without mentioning which one, helping render more visible the continuity between the socialist and postwar period. Yet, I would suggest important differences exist between the role of League of Communists in distributing access to opportunities and perks during socialism and what is happening today. The Communist Party in its early postwar years faced a growing economy, whereas the size of the “cake” available for redistribution has become smaller today. Before, a person had to enter the Party in order to become a manager (*direktor*) or to take some other prestigious position. In Jajce today, owing to the recession and the sheer number of parties, one has to have an affiliation to get a job as a custodian, a driver or an administrative assistant.

as) a nationalist inevitably painted a person in negative moral hues. Dijana, a social worker in her early thirties, observed that for those reasons no one admits in public that he is a nationalist, even though people say and do other things that make them appear as precisely that.

Erol, a Bosniak coffee shop owner, was himself very critical of people who make inflammatory nationalist statements in public, without thinking about how such words will impact Muslim-Croat relations. As a small business owner, he was particularly weary of members of the Bosniak diaspora who were calling for the removal of the nationalist monument to Croat liberators, which had been erected in the center of the town by HDZ in the early years following the war. “It is easy *for them* in diaspora to be up-in-arms, nationalistic and demand such things, but I have to live and work here...these people [i.e. Croats in Jajce] are my neighbors and customers.” Many residents of Jajce saw publicly making nationalist demands as socially undesirable and threatening to the repair of social relations between Croats and Muslims.

“Turncoat” nationalists and opportunists posed an additional problem. Nusreta, a Muslim woman in her fifties married to a local Croat, told me she was disgusted by the speed and willingness with which some of her neighbors had adopted nationalist colors. Speaking of one former neighbor in particular, she exclaimed: “Give me a break! Yesterday, he was an avid communist, and today, he is prancing around with the nationalists. I’d understand it if he were from the village, *where they have always thought of the world in this way*, but he knows better!” In Nusreta’s terms, what was problematic was not the nationalist affiliation itself, but the sinister way in which her “urban” friend acted in order to seize new opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, narrations about strength of character and moral consistency were at the heart of postwar imaginings of ethical personhood. In this idealized picture, remaining the same despite cataclysmic shifts in one’s surroundings was the condition of being seen as a moral individual. For example, a moral resident of Jajce did not stop greeting, standing up for or helping his fellow citizens after the war just because they were of different ethnicity from him. In times of uncertainty, when on the ruins of one political system another one was being built, a person had to pick a side, and stick to it.

Yet these idealized perceptions obscured the fact that for a young person like Zlata, Jajce offered few opportunities, as was evidenced by the mass out-migration of youth from the town. Opting to return to one’s hometown with a college degree often did not yield employment. While older residents of Jajce lamented in passing that Jajce was a town “without a future,” others were looking for pragmatic ways of improving their circumstances. This pragmatism was in part driven by a perception that a) one had to carve out a place for oneself in this context and b) that nationalist parties had the means of distributing scarce resources and opportunities. Katarina, an unemployed schoolteacher in her late twenties, hoped that becoming a member of the Croat nationalist party, the HDZ, would help her find a job. Alma, another college graduate from an adjacent village, told me she had no problem joining the SDA, since “if she did not seize the opportunity, someone else would.”

Although incentives to join political parties seemed strong, some of my younger informants held strong convictions against such decisions, opting to instead work in the non-governmental sector or at least join one of the non-nationalist parties, like the Social

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<sup>23</sup> The discourses that frame the war and “return” of nationalism in terms of “revenge of the countryside” (see critique by Bougarel 1999) abound in former Yugoslavia. I do not have the space to adequately analyze them here, except to say that they fit nicely into the understanding of nationalist loyalty as a matter of false, unenlightened consciousness. Nusreta herself replicates this view, arguing that nationalism in the village is to be expected, and proposing it is only a problem and aberration in the urban area where people are supposed to be better educated.

Democrats.<sup>24</sup> Yet, Social Democrats, though non-nationalists, were also not exempt from scrutiny. Rumors abounded in town that one of their key cadres hired her under-qualified brother in a position that should have been filled through a more thorough job search, based on expertise. Yet residents of Jajce sympathetic of Social Democrats were also the most fearless critics of clientelist networks. Tanja, a small business owner in her early thirties, openly expressed criticism of several of her friends who had joined the Muslim nationalist party in hope of obtaining a job. Yet she was even more critical of those among her friends who joined out of political naiveté, such as her friend Mirza, a young doctor, who wanted to make a difference in the SDA by offering a youthful and forward-looking perspective. The party had silenced whatever progressive ideas Mirza had, Tanja insisted, and had turned him into a mere serf.

Ironically, Tanja was one of Zlata's best friends. Both were children born out of ethnically mixed relationships and had ethnically ambiguous names. While Tanja did not claim to belong to any "community" in particular, Zlata was during my stay in Jajce becoming increasingly interested in Islam and in this way asserting her Bosniak identity<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, Tanja was extremely outspoken about her criticisms of the town's mayor, who she believed was a crook, a chauvinist and a hillbilly. Zlata, on the other hand, repeated a mantra I heard a lot among the mayor's supporters, insisting that, as the first Bosniak mayor of Jajce after the war, he had succeeded in "returning Bosnia to Jajce" by removing Croat nationalist insignia and flags and replacing them with symbols of the Bosnian state. Such proclamations made Tanja suspicious of Zlata's political position; despite being her friend, she too believed Zlata was lying about the true status of her relationship with the SDA. And yet, the two of them, as I discovered, rarely talked about this. It was precisely this silence, the unspoken nature of their political differences, and the uncertainty of Zlata's status with regard to the SDA that made their friendship possible.

Moreover, despite being aware of rumors, Zlata never bothered to once and for all resolve the dilemma among her friends and acquaintances, because revealing her possible relationship with the SDA would most certainly taint her image among her antinationalist buddies. Instead, she too took part in critical conversations about the political situation over coffee, often providing empirical proof for their suspicions of misdoings in the municipal government and agencies.<sup>26</sup> And yet, by also partaking in the activities of the local government, holding on to her job, and fulfilling her duties as a municipal employee, she seemed to be exhibiting loyalty to the nationalist mayor and his party. The fact that Zlata was reluctant to publicly announce where she stood proved that she not only understood the unique advantage of her ambiguous position but that she also was aware of the moral caveats which made everyone else suspicious of her.

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, I got to know among this group several Bosniaks and Croats that regularly attended the mosques and churches, taking part in the religious ceremonies while being outspoken in their opposition to nationalist parties in power.

<sup>25</sup> In her comments to me, fellow anthropologist of Bosnia, Sabrina Perić has suggested that one could make an argument that Zlata's decision is a form of strategic essentialism and structurally related to the underlying Dayton principle where everything is "ethnically" determined. Significantly, as a person born out of a "mixed marriage", Zlata had to pick a side, and she picked the "dominant" one; part of her effort to reassert her Bosniak identity then may have had something to do with the fact she was not simply and "organically" a Bosniak. But as Perić persuasively put forth to me, Zlata's case renders visible a paradoxical aspect of Dayton that is already part of its makeup: ethnic identity is not proscribed by birth and descent (blood) and so one can, in some cases "choose" one's ethnicity. In that sense, ethnicity and national belonging is determined through one's declaration of oneself as belonging to a nation (Perić brilliantly points out that the problem with Finci and Sejdić is not that they are a Jew and a Roma but that they were unwilling to declare themselves as Serb, Bosniak or Croat). The question is: what are the limits of this self-declaration in practice?

<sup>26</sup> Of course, I have to acknowledge the possibility that she was also performing in front of me, in order to appear more critical (and hence more cosmopolitan) in the eyes of a researcher who had come from Sarajevo and from the U.S. The question of to what extent our informants give us—and to what extent we hear—what we want, is an important and open one.

One evening, as we walked home together, she came as close as she ever did to explaining herself, by telling me that she understood why some young people were joining the party. “It’s not like the nationalists are ever going to leave. Perhaps the best we can hope for is for a new generation to take over, and reform it from within.” In listening to her words, I realized she might have been talking about herself, present or future, and her own motivations to become part of something that in others’ eyes turned her into a jaded, corrupted person.

I reiterate here the claim that certain forms of ambiguity like the ones displayed in Zlata’s indecipherable political positioning made for forms of politics and types of personhood that were at once both discouraging and hopeful about the future. The fact that Zlata possibly willingly became part of a group engaged in problematic and at times quite destructive forms of politics testified to the growing hegemonic power of nationalist projects to co-opt and integrate even the best of political intentions. Today’s nationalist divisions do not simply supply proof that residents of Bosnia have always seen themselves as having irreconcilable political goals—increasingly throughout Bosnian and Herzegovinian towns, these divisions form the grid for allocation of access to resources, jobs and desired private futures. They organize life in such a way that almost invalidates the question of whether or not they are based in deeply held convictions. In that sense, telling people in cities or in provinces just how corrupt their nationalist representatives are won’t make much difference.<sup>27</sup> Chances are they already know it, but that knowledge does not liberate them. Instead it further convinces them of the immutability of the new layout within which they must make their lives. This fact alone will be a cause of despair to some Bosnians and some anthropologists alike.

However, nationalist projects, like all other world-making ambitions, never fully subsume the forms of life which they produce through their own contradictions. If the very possibility of being a political subject in Bosnia is predicated upon having to engage with this figure of the nationalist—as I argue above—this political subjectivity is also caught in the ethical conundrum emergent in the same figure. As we see in the case of Zlata, the trouble arises when those new types of political subjectification, repeated each day through disciplinary institutions, the work of government and distribution of resources, encounter residual normative prescriptions and forms of affect, i.e. commitment to moral consistency, skepticism of party politics, and even the virtuousness of certain forms of interethnic conviviality. Zlata for a period of time cultivated (among at least one part of the public) her own ambiguity with respect to the SDA affiliation, which in and of itself supplied proof that there was nothing normal or naturalized about taking part in nationalist politics. The risk and possibly shame that seemed to be a part of being associated with the governing nationalists (which may or may not have been codified through party membership), suggested that her political positionality was a product of complex negotiations, tactics, and desires, which had a stake in multiple loyalties. Certain inassimilable excess lies in this space of ambiguity, marked by a tension between complex historical experiences and the acute exigencies of the present. While uncertainty and risk fill this space, its very existence also points to just how fragile this new order is. Indeed, ethical conundrums like the one I describe here make known that rival forms of political imagination still exist, even if there is no framework in which they can be fully realized.

My account of Zlata’s situation argued that under some circumstances, purposeful incoherence of political actions and motifs, enables one’s simultaneous existence in multiple worlds, and leaves open the possibility for multiple personal and collective futures. The section

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<sup>27</sup> The 2012 report of Transparency International in Bosnia names Jajce as the second “least transparent” municipality in Bosnia. This ranking did not surprise me, but I doubt the publication of this report will change anything.

that follows takes this argument further, to ask whether such political ambiguity carries with it moral conundrums and political caveats that in the end, cannot be digested, even by those who are the most willing to leave the past behind.

### *How to Tell a Nationalist*

While conducting research in Jajce, I developed a friendly relationship with forty-something “Bogdanka,” a Serb returnee to one of villages on the outskirts of Jajce who had spent the end of the war and the first years of the postwar period in the town of Brčko. Many of the Jajce Serbs established themselves anew in this northeastern Bosnian town and special administrative district, when HVO troupes pushed them out of the town in the course of the Operation “Storm.” Bogdanka and her husband, prompted by years of employment and housing problems, and in a manner that was atypical for Serbs from this region after the war, returned to Jajce. “At least here,” Bogdanka told me, “I am in my own house.”

Returning was by no means easy, especially because Bogdanka was initially the only one in her family willing to come back to Jajce. She hoped that her resolve would affect her family’s change of mind; as she expected, her husband and daughter joined her in Jajce after several months of separation. When she returned, Bogdanka had to cut through a small forest of berry shrubs that had spread all around her house during her absence. Her hands bled from the bushes’ thorns, but she was more determined than ever. Even a few obligatory visits by representatives of Croat nationalist government did not intimidate her. She hoped to return to the land, growing organic vegetables, first for her own consumption, and later even as a form of a small business. Her job in a state-owned department store was no longer an option, as her firm had long ago gone bankrupt. To support his family, her husband, a former soldier in the Army of Republika Srpska, temporarily went to Slovenia where he found seasonal work in construction. In the meantime, Bogdanka reconnected with her friends in town, including former coworkers and neighbors. She was active in the women’s organization Viktorija 99, and especially interested in its efforts to promote small business ownership among local women. In her spare time, Bogdanka tried to learn as much as she could about organic agriculture, herbs and alternative medicine.

Her unique interests, hard work and determination went hand in hand with her seeming lack of interest in politics and strong orientation towards the future. Despite her air of “healthy skepticism” about politics of the sort that I encountered a lot during my fieldwork in Bosnia, Bogdanka held stern opinions on many different issues. For one, she was the only person that I encountered in Jajce who did not sing praises to the socialist period. When I pressed her to explain why this was so, she explained that the promises of socialist state often went unrealized for members of the working classes such as herself. She submitted as proof the inability of her husband and herself to secure an apartment in one of the new complexes that would help them separate from their in-laws. “In every regime, elites benefit and the small people get scraps,” she declared. Given her conviction that ordinary people were powerless, Bogdanka was also skeptical of the power of the ballot box, most of the time refraining from voting. She had heard rumors that representatives of political parties sometimes brought gifts to people’s doors in hopes of persuading constituents to cast their ballots, but regrettably, she said, such a thing never happened to her.

During the lent, Bogdanka invited me into her home to share a meal of fried trout and potato salad. I found her there hosting one of her childhood friends, a Muslim woman from a nearby village, who was there to bemoan her marital problems. After she left, Bogdanka eagerly showed me photographs of her own family, expressing hopes she would soon become a grandmother. She recounted more details of her struggles in Brčko and worried out loud that the new economic crisis would cost her husband his Slovenian job. But then, as we sat down to share a meal, the conversation turned political. As if confiding in me, her unusual out-of-town guest, she began telling me about the details of the start of war in Jajce, which according to her began because of Croat provocations in the nearby barracks of Bravnice. I listened attentively, wishing to learn more about her perspective, and realizing Bogdanka was about to open up in a way she hadn't before.

And then, a stream of withheld opinions on often unrelated and disconnected issues started rolling down the hill like a bag of stones and twigs. As I soon realized, this was to be a list of grievances about the representations of Serbs and other ethnic groups in the last war. She alleged gross exaggeration of the numbers of Bosniak victims in Srebrenica, claiming that included on the list of the massacred were people who had already been dead or died of natural causes. When I proclaimed I was not sure that was the case, and that she had to remember similar allegations had been made in the case of WWII camp Jasenovac in Croatia (in which tens of thousands of Serbs lost their lives in this part of Bosnia), she seemed unfazed by my offer of contextualization and an exit out of what promised to be an ugly conversation. She continued to move through a fairly familiar repertoire of Serb nationalist grievances, stories of persecution, suffering and victimhood to which Serbs were subjected by other ethnic groups, inserting a characteristic mix of conspiracies and wild theories about the start of war and its purpose. In the end, she proclaimed Muslims (Bosniaks) were not even a proper nationality, and would not even be a nation had Tito not granted them such status in the later 1960s.

After the initial shock of discovering an entirely new dimension of Bogdanka's worldview, I began to wonder why she was telling me all this. I was fairly certain that she knew I was Muslim, so I could not explain away her rant as an act of commiseration based on perceived ethnic solidarity. In Jajce, I never hid my own dislike of nationalist parties (or for that matter, all other parties) from my ethnographic interlocutors, nor was it a mystery that my family remained in Sarajevo during the almost four year long wartime siege.<sup>28</sup> But just as I was getting lost in my own deep thoughts, Bogdanka's rant was interrupted by another visit. It was Zakir, the father of one of my closest interlocutors in Jajce, who had stopped by on the way back from Zenica, to say hello to his longtime friend and former coworker. Bogdanka greeted Zakir, her third Muslim guest that day, with the proclamation that this man is her closest, most valuable and dearest friend. "No one has been better to me than this man," she proclaimed [*Niko mi nije više valjao od ovog čovjeka*].

As the three of us sat and shared the sweets and soda that Zakir brought as gifts to his host, I listened to the two of them recount the anecdotes about their prewar work in the state owned department store, and exchange updates on the whereabouts of their various family members and plans for the summer. Their friendly exchanges seemed completely ordinary and

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<sup>28</sup> On some level, it was not Bogdanka who surprised me, but my own reaction to her exclamation about the non-existence of the Bosniak nations. Even though I normally do not get very worked up about such questions of national definition, I was deeply offended by her aggressive remark, because I felt it was a part of a particularly unnecessary and spiteful nationalist dogma, which denied specificity and political subjectivity to a group of people to which I belong, at least nominally. It was this kind of rhetoric that opened doors to killings, internment camps, massacres, systemic rapes of women, burning down of houses, and other forms of ethnic cleansing.

comfortable, even though Zakir did not stay very long. He offered to give me a ride back to Jajce, which I eagerly accepted in an act of my own anthropological opportunism, wishing to as soon as possible jot down some notes. On the way back, Zakir began telling me about his own fraught friendship with Bogdanka and her husband, who were his old and once very close family friends. Zakir was well aware of Bogdanka's nationalist views, and reported fighting with her and her husband about the validity of their arguments and the truthfulness of their stories about the war. On a few occasions, he even openly accused them of lying about their role in the war and the broader political context. Zakir was especially concerned that Bogdanka's son, who did not return to live in Jajce, held extremists views and often valorized Serb nationalist radicals. But rather than give up on the friendship, Zakir persisted in his efforts to reform Bogdanka and her family, and through his presence in their lives rid them of their nationalism. He even insisted that his son reach out to Bogdanka's daughter so that they can be friends. The plan did not seem to be working. What's more, Zakir's own wife did not want to do anything with Bogdanka or her husband. Even though a soldier in the RS army, Bogdanka's husband did nothing to protect her aging parents, who refused to leave Jajce in October 1992, and were killed by the Serb army a short time after.

Despite my awkward exchange with Bogdanka, her rant and subsequent contradicting behavior, our rapport remained unchanged. Before I left Jajce, she knit me a pair of wool socks, in a gesture that was meant to invite future friendship and contacts. But Bogdanka also left to me as an heirloom (u *amanet*) a set of complicated questions about the present and the future of interethnic relations. Like in the case of Zlata, her words and deeds seemed disconnected, her attitudes not reflective of her behaviors and efforts to repair and sustain bonds of sociality that made up Jajce as a community. Moreover, as a member of a definite ethnic minority, Bogdanka seemed to make little effort to conceal her views, especially in her closest relationships where the threat of such revelation may have been presumed to be the most costly. Scholars of ethnic conflict claim that during wartime ethnic others are often stripped of their individuality, so as to make them archetypal representatives of the nations and therefore legitimate targets. But in the case of Bogdanka, one could argue that it was precisely the context of a friendly conversation and rapport that made the expression of her nationalist view not only possible but also perfectly reasonable. What's most interesting is that Bogdanka did not seem to care whether or not her Muslim interlocutors agreed with her views or even whether they had been offended. In fact, she made no effort to have a conversation or compromise. Her standpoint was from the start antagonistic, and unapologetically so, suggesting that she did not believe a shared set of principles to be a predisposition for friendship or a meaningful social rapport. One could say this is not good enough—that her support for reactionary views espoused by very same agents that undertook ethnic cleansing and genocide—is morally abhorrent and indefensible. But to Bogdanka, these views had their own truth, which could not be amended even through Zakir's persistent, even self-effacing efforts.

The question that Bogdanka's case raises is whether a political and moral consensus, a shared set of basic norms and beliefs, is in fact necessary for the future of a community. Every day, through her presence and actions, Bogdanka enacted apparent forms of interethnic cooperation and tolerance. Her very return to Jajce is read as a signal of her commitment to a shared future, even though what Bogdanka and her Muslim friends may mean by this may differ substantially. This is to say that one must be careful not to equate postwar return and interethnic mingling with any kind of nostalgia, commitment to "brotherhood and unity," or even hope for further political unification. Actions do not guarantee ideological consent, even though in some



cases their absence is a problem. Bogdanka's husband failed Zakir's family not because of his nationalism or even conscription into the RS army. He failed to show through his action that he valued friendship more than national loyalty or was at least willing to put himself at risk on behalf of someone else. Plenty of Bosniaks would read Zakir's story as extremely politically and morally problematic, and his attempts to rebuild a relationship with his Serb friends as a form of weakness and foolishness that seems to foreshadow future disappointment as well as testify to historical lessons not learned. It may be indeed that certain forms of nostalgia underground Zakir's futile attempts to remake his friends into the people that he wants them to be. But Zakir too is trying to restore a possibility of a future, even though he realizes such an act comes at a cost to his own person.

### *The Status of the Past in the Present*

In Bosnia at large, the war and the postwar compromise cast a new light on memories of at times amicable, at times tense interethnic relations, thereby also exposing ripples in the official doctrine of "brotherhood and unity" and transforming the existing epistemologies and understandings of ethnic difference. Complex histories of struggle for power and domination became reduced to unchanging eternity of ethno-national conflict. Concurrently, the folk philosophy of "shared life" [*zajednički život*], came under attack from all sides, to be replaced by new social and political technologies of ethnic separation and segregation. Yet as my ethnographic materials have been suggesting, these new arrangements of things and people play out upon the ruin of a different and in some ways ideologically antagonistic political project, whose failures and successes haunt the present-day aspirations, hopes and modes of imagining the future. Contemporary forms of social and police discipline collide with the memories of doing or thinking otherwise, creating rifts and cracks in which people like Zeko sit and dwell.

Understanding the disrupting potentials of these lived histories (as well as to justify the political decisions that lead to the war and the atrocities that marked it), warmongers needed an unambiguous narrative about the region's past, one in which the difference between self and other would be immediately knowable and unquestionable. This in part explains the élan with which HVO militia proceeded to transform the symbolic landscape of the town, changing names of streets and squares. Yet, neither the war nor the various forms of sanctimonious historical revisionism, could complete the giant, daunting task of remaking the world. Much of that process had to be relegated to mundane aspects of everyday life, where new institutions and new technologies of domination, reeducation and incentivization could come together to produce political subjects more amenable to the nationa(ist) order. In towns like Jajce, where ethnic identification interlaces neighborly geographies, bonds of care, famed love stories, and memories of lost prosperity, "brotherhood and unity" looms over the present like a specter and yet another form of loss.

As I draw this chapter to a close, I offer the final argument that the past does not provide a ready-made blueprint for generating political alternatives. Specters of socialist history and contemporary forms of "Yugonostalgia" themselves reflect all of the complexities of the old establishment. Yugoslav socialism was a hegemonic project, in so far that it was able (at least for a period of time) to bring under the same roof liberals and conservatives, nationalists and internationalists, reformists and reactionaries, all of whom had a distinct understandings of and a specific interest in Yugoslavia as a political community. This plurality of these political

orientations is reflected today among those who long for the times past, yet may possess radically different ideas about what Yugoslavia was, or which aspects of its political repertoire deserve to be made relevant again.

Such questions gain even greater force in this former Yugoslav republic, which paid the highest price—in violence, displacement, and destruction—for the break up of Yugoslavia. Bosnia historically played a very special role in the Yugoslav socialist imaginary because it was the only republic with no clear national majority, and as such, presented a demographic microcosm of the entire federation. Moreover, Bosnia's rugged lands provided the terrain on which much of the Partisan resistance took place during WWII. Consequently, it is a favorite meeting spot of people who long for the days of Yugoslavia, who flock to towns like Jajce, but also historically relevant sites in Drvar, Jablanica, and mounts Sutjeska and Kozara, to celebrate former socialist holidays and the country that was once their home.

Celebrations of various socialist anniversaries and former holidays have become a tradition throughout the region, thanks to the initiative and planning of a growing network of Josip Broz Tito Memorial Societies (Udruženja Josip Broz Tito),<sup>29</sup> whose affiliates and chapters continue to appear in various parts of the former federation. The first such societies emerged in Croatia around 1996, notably in the capital of Zagreb and the traditional leftist stronghold of Istria, paving way in 2000 for the first massive celebration Day of Youth, Tito's official birthday, in his home village of Kumrovec in Western Croatia. Shortly after, the idea to found such organizations traveled outside of Croatia and continued to spread to all parts of Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Montenegro. In addition to existing antifascist and veterans association, new groups<sup>30</sup> interested in celebrating and preserving the memory of Yugoslavia, in both serious and playful ways, concurrently emerged. They wish to sustain and reinvigorate certain aspects of the political project that despite its serious limitations helped modernize Yugoslavia, develop its economy, provide social services, and create a sense of pan-national unity.

Each year around November 29, the former socialist holiday, Jajce welcomes a crowd of a few thousand of these visitors from all over former Yugoslavia. In 2008, these visitors and local hosts marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Congress of AVNOJ, by officially opening the reconstructed Museum in Jajce to the public. Despite the gloomy November day, and Jajce's war ravaged landscape, there were plenty of colorful sights and the buzzing sounds of nostalgia markets. Visitors dressed up as Yugoslav Pioneers or even as young partisan girls, arrived side-by-side WWII veterans in their ceremonial army uniforms, with full military honors. The biggest sensation was the Slovenian actor, Ivo Godnič, one of the most prominent Tito impersonators. Dressed in a replica of the Marshal's white uniform, he arrived in a limousine, much to the delight of the gathered crowds, who then addressed him with various praises and requests to pose for a photograph.<sup>31</sup> Amidst speeches, the ceremonial lying of wreaths and the obligatory cultural program at the House of Culture, there were also tables full of trinkets and souvenirs, where various people from Jajce and beyond were trying to make a buck. On one such

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<sup>29</sup> Throughout this text, I will sometimes also refer to these associations as JBT Societies and Tito Memorial Societies. I will occasionally refer to the members of these groups as "Titoists."

<sup>30</sup> Among such projects are organizations Naša Jugoslavija (Our Yugoslavia) in Pula, Croatia, Generalni Konzulat SFRJ (General Consulate of SFRY) in Tivat, Montenegro, project Titoslavija in Sarajevo, and various virtual initiatives such as the now defunct Cyber Yugoslavia.

<sup>31</sup> The legendary Serbian Black Wave film director and the chronicler of the 1968 Student Movement, Želimir Žilnik, made a 1993 work of documentary fiction by staging a walk by a Tito impersonator through the streets of Belgrade, encountering the city's residents in various states of trauma and denial of what was happening in by then defunct Yugoslavia. The film is entitled "Tito among the Serbs for the second time."

table, I saw a T-Shirt with a confident message to the nationalists and the new political and economic elites: “Your time is (almost) done” [*Vaše vrijeme ističe*].



**Figure 9:** Sanin and Zlatko from Sarajevo chapter of JBT Society in front of the AVNOJ Museum in Jajce, November 2008

Jajce lacked the resources to play a generous host, but guests were treated to a serving of Partisan bean stew. I learned from Zeko that Slovenian delegation has for the past few years been bringing various items, including cured meats and alcohol, to share with attendees of the modestly prepared festivities. While some residents of Jajce appreciate such a gesture, others see it as a patronizing act by the economically much better positioned Slovenians who may have thought they were providing charity. Familiar problems of socialist era redistribution, therefore, make themselves visible even when it comes to foods and provisions at an event celebrating the memory of Yugoslavia.

These and other gatherings of Yugonostalgics, organized by the regional networks of the abovementioned associations, at first glance appear to embody a consistent political vision that derives its inspiration from the region’s socialist history. After all, official descriptions in promotional materials, mission statements of the organizing groups, and the omnipresence of political speeches, flags, and other political memorabilia at these events seem to suggest a coherent project whose political nature stays easily recognizable to most current and former residents of the region. Undoubtedly, common political themes at these official gatherings exist, as adjectives such as antifascist, antinationalist, and much less frequently, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, recur routinely at their every corner.

But important differences and incoherencies exist, sometimes reflecting the divergent post-Yugoslav trajectories on which the former socialist republics have embarked. For example, when the different republic delegations were invited to address the audiences in the House of Culture in Jajce, their speeches differed in, to this observer, predictable ways. The Slovenes and Croatians, coming from socialist republics that first stepped out of the federation in 1991,

underlined the doctrine of national self-determination, which was guaranteed to various republics and peoples at the time of Yugoslavia's founding. The Serbian delegation mostly lamented the passing of a strong and globally significant state. By contrast, the delegation from the Muslim-Croat part of Bosnia used the opportunity to warn the general public about the ongoing reemergence of nationalist rhetoric and fascist politics, urgently reminding everyone of the deteriorating political situation in its own divided country. At the same time, the delegation from Republika Srpska eschewed sensitive political topics and instead had its choir perform several revolutionary songs. The Macedonian delegation did not even get to deliver a speech, because they, having the longest return journey, had to head back before the end of the program! Hence these celebrations not only reflect some of the differences in the understandings of Yugoslav political project across the region, but also show how political aspirations of "Yugonostalgics" remain firmly rooted in the present, and the ongoing struggles across ideological, national and regional divides.



**Figure 10:** Slovenian Tito impersonator arrives in Jajce, November 2008.

Journeying with members and sympathizers of Tito societies from Bosnia, I discovered that while most people who go to these meetings do in fact hold dear Yugoslav (socialist) values, their motivations for making these at times long and uncomfortable trips are not exclusively political. These meetings are social occasions, and their communal aspect is not to be underestimated. Old-timers go as much out of sentimental affect as from the desire to travel, socialize, and have a good time. The young people who join the older visitors at these events have their own unique reasons for coming along. Many belong to youth wings of the socialist or social democratic parties or to various contemporary antifascist, anarchist, or anti-capitalist organizations in the post-Yugoslav states. They aim to reconnect to the heritage of a time which most of them lived only as children or did not experience first hand at all. Just like for the older generations, part of the attraction originates in the possibility of having a really good time. On the buses I have traveled with from Bosnia, there tended to be a great number of single young



men, most of who are secretly drawn in by the promise of a fleeting romance with a likeminded girl from some other part of former Yugoslavia.

Many of these meetings turn into picnics, feasts, and occasions to drink and be merry. Sometimes travelers on the buses start drinking from the very moment of departure, sharing bottles of plum brandy and home brewed liquors [*iz domaće proizvodnje*]. A crucial aspect of these journeys are the music and singing, whether alongside the “Partisan songs” cassette tapes that someone always brings along or the Society’s choir members that may be accompanying the bus to its destination. The music repertoire includes various revolutionary songs, regional folk melodies with patriotic undertones, and the unofficial anthem of the Society, “Comrade Tito, We Swear to You.” The Yugoslav national anthem, “Hey, Slavs,” and the Serbo-Croatian version of the Internationale, “Rise up you earthly slaves,” are sometimes sung on buses but are more frequently performed preceding the political speeches once the programs of the manifestations have already begun. After the food and drinks have been consumed, depending on the size of the event, various groups break into song and dance, particularly the revolutionary collective folk dance, *Kozaračko kolo*, which can sometimes involve up to a hundred dancers.



**Figure 11:** Kozaračko kolo starting in Jajce, November 2008

Some of the critical observers of Yugonostalgic gatherings dismiss them as populist celebrations, whose political character and value stands as dubious at best. Because of the celebratory aspect of these meetings, and the emphasis on food and drinking, critics have placed them under the rubric with the pejorative title: “bread and games.” The Latin saying out of which the phrase was derived—*panem et circenses*—refers to the ways in which powers that be use shallow and trivial incentives, such as populist entertainment and gluttonous feasts, to politically demobilize the populations under their rule. In late socialist Yugoslavia, this phrase became a way of capturing the seeming lack of popular dissent, allegedly enabled by shallow

pleasures of the good life, filled with consumption and celebration<sup>32</sup> that marked the decade of 1980s. The use of this phrase continues in the postwar period as well.

My own interpretation of such sensorial, affective and celebratory aspects of these organized commemorative practices moves in a different direction. First of all, the omnipresence of music, dancing and other creative entertainment (however misguided it can sometimes be), reminds one of the customary festivities that were a part of the Partisan resistance during WWII. The leadership of the Yugoslav army maintained high morale by supporting different forms of artistic production and cultural life, even during some of the most difficult periods of the war. As such, creative participatory entertainment presents a genre of social experience that does not necessarily lead to quenching of political aspirations, but may as well help fuel commitments to certain kinds of political visions. Secondly, these ordinary practices and everyday pleasures, such as consumption of certain kinds of foods and music, but also simply *druženje* or “hanging out,” are in and of themselves productive of particular kinds of persons and inter-group solidarities. They helped create generations of people who identified with Yugoslavia not because they were fully convinced by socialist ideology, but because they shared a common cultural experience.

Political projects, including creation of nation-states, rely precisely on such colonization of the everyday life, and mundane practices through which strangers come to see themselves as members of the same community. What is at stake in such post-Yugoslav gatherings as the ones I have described here, is a reenactment of a bodily memory and a reproduction of a certain social relationship. In fact, enacted at these meetings is a way of relating socially to others on which socialist Yugoslavism was founded. In rehearsing these encounters, contemporary Yugonostalgics keep alive not only the memory of a less uncertain and more pleasurable past, but they also help perpetuate the practices and the forms of life which the long gone country enabled and relied on through the nearly five decades of its existence. The organizers of events recognize and make use of this. Hence, these manifestations call into being a sense of political being and action that is rooted not in ideology, but in sociality, that is, a practiced social relationship.

### *A Tale of two Buses and two Milans: some thoughts on the slippery politics of Yugonostalgia*

Given these intentions, what kinds of social relationships do emerge in the course of remembering socialist Yugoslavia and its charismatic leader, Marshal Tito? And how might those forms of relatedness help shed light on political potentials and limits of the Yugonostalgia phenomenon and its officialized practices? Does the emphasis on repairing the bonds of sociality provide a sufficient strategy for a reconciliation? And do they offer any lessons to war ravaged, and in some ways still divided Jajce?

In this last ethnographic section, I move these questions outside of my field site to examine my encounters with two members of the JBT Society chapters from Sarajevo and Banja Luka, both named Milan, who accompanied me during my bus journeys to two out-of-town manifestations, and the other Yugonostalgics I met on my ways. The first story concerns the bus trip with the Sarajevan Titoists who traveled to Kumrovec in late May of 2009, and the other a much shorter journey with the members of the Banja Luka chapter to the emerging festival of

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<sup>32</sup> Echoes of such interpretations could also be located in the scholarly understandings of carnival as an event that temporarily suspends the rules, in order to help release accumulated social tensions.

Yugonostalgia, “Days of Balkan Love” [*Dani balkanske ljubavi*] in Bosanska Otoka, undertaken in early August 2010.

Although not my first visit to a (post)socialist memorial or my first manifestation of this sort, my journey to Kumrovec was the first time I signed up to accompany one of the JBT chapters to this kind of a celebration. On this bus, I met for the first time my interlocutor Milan,<sup>33</sup> an older gentleman with a sparkling, short-sleeved white shirt and pressed gray trousers (an outfit that captured a different sense of time and history). Milan was too young to be a veteran of the WWII, but he had been a member of the Communist Party and admitted to have lost the social status he enjoyed during socialism. Nevertheless, he carried himself with great dignity and was interested in my project, occasionally contacting me to give me ideas about materials I should collect. Although we had a very long conversation during our 14-hour long trip to Kumrovec and back, he never told me, and I never asked about his ethnic background. This uncertainty resulted not only out of social mores which made asking such question on my behalf rude, but the tacit and shared assumption that in this context such a piece of information ought to have not mattered.



**Figure 12:** On the bus, and on the way to Kumrovec, May 2009

Traveling alongside us, on a bus whose windows were covered in the images of Marshal Tito, were various other members of the society, including a group of young men that I had grown to know in the course of my two year long field work. Sanin who was hardly 18 at the time, and Zlatko, a college student in his early twenties, frequented such manifestations and often dressed as Yugoslav pioneers, even though they were clearly too old to play such a role. Sanin, especially, had become a minor TV celebrity, because he showed up at almost every relevant occasion and had already become recognizable as one of the youngest members of the Society. The rest of the people (including the Croatian border guard who was on duty that morning) were fascinated by his youth and often asked him questions about why he participated

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<sup>33</sup> In order to protect my informants about whom I write in this section, I have changed all of the names and some identifying markers.

in such events if he did not have any memory of Yugoslavia. Sanin would always have a ready answer, which emphasized the fact his parents raised him in the spirit of Tito, whose leadership was unparalleled. Yet one could not ignore the fact that both Sanin and Zlatko were members of the SDP Youth Forum, and planned to become members of the party. They were also involved with other activist organizations in Sarajevo, often supporting the myriad of emergent initiatives for political change, yet their politics and rhetoric by no means reflected some kind of a hard-line support for the communist revolution. Instead, in a more general manner, they professed adherence to the values of antinationalism, and repeated familiar phrases about “better times” and the need for reform.

I presumed most of the people on the bus, traveling to Kumrovec, had similar orientations if not political aspirations. But as I discovered during a coffee break in a road café we stopped by after we crossed the Croatian border, some of the Society’s members were looking for other political visions beyond the SDP. One man in his late 30s showed others his brand new membership card for another opposition party, People’s Party With Work through Betterment [*Narodna stranka Radom za boljitak*], which (despite having been founded by Croat businessmen from Herzegovina), had multinational membership and a reform program. “This is the future,” the man proclaimed, while the others looked at him skeptically.

When we finally arrived to Kumrovec, the group dissipated, wandering around into different corners of the complex, visiting Tito’s house of birth, looking at but rarely buying souvenirs, and finally settling in to hear the official welcome of the League of JBT Societies in Croatia. Somewhere along the way, we went in line to take a photograph with the flower covered famous statue of Tito made by Croatian sculptor Antun Augustinčić, which grabbed the attention of all visitors. In 2004, the statue’s head was blown off by unknown perpetrators, but later repaired. The visitors touched it, stroked it and talked to it as if it was sacred.<sup>34</sup> Some of them cried, including my companion Milan, whose eyes welled up with tears, which he promptly wiped with a cotton handkerchief. But the sadness turned out to be transient, as everyone’s tears could quickly transformed into laughter, helped by copious amounts of alcohol—the demand for which made the waiters in the nearby restaurants run around frantically, like “flies without their heads.” Soon, different inebriated groups began singing socialist songs, followed by the formation of the ever-expanding *Kozaračko kolo*.

I wondered around this tremendously large event, in search of interesting sights and people to whom I could talk, and found two pseudo pioneers from Zagorje, in their late forties with whom I started to chat. They admitted feeling nervous about coming to the gathering, because for a long time, social pressures in their part of Croatia made traveling to Kumrovec for the Day of Youth contentious and politically risky. During the heyday of Croatian nationalism in the 1990s, the village of Kumrovec could not even be found on the map of the newly independent Croatian state. Curators worked hard to reimagine the site not only as birthplace of Tito but as a much less controversial open-air ethnographic museum, showcasing the traditions of Zagorje. Yet on that day, these two *Zagorci* were fully equipped with blue hats and red scarves, which made them look sincere but slightly ridiculous given their age and perturbing, round bellies. They inquired with me about the situation in Bosnia, and from their questions, I realized that despite the geographic proximity and the fact they once shared a country with my companions (and me), they knew or understood very little about Bosnian contemporary political realities.

No one among my interlocutors that day advocated or acknowledged the possibility of

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<sup>34</sup> For more information on the practices surrounding the statue, see Belaj 2006



there ever being another Yugoslavia. Moreover, none of them had a plan or a political program for war stricken and economically troubled Bosnia. When I asked my co-travelers on the bus about the reasons why they wanted to come to such an event, everyone described it as an opportunity to socialize and meet other people (*druženje*). That I expected more from their responses testified to my own slanted and limited view of what these celebrations ought to represent and do. I returned to Sarajevo with a couple of new books, several new contacts, and an unresolved disappointment about what this journey was supposed to accomplish.



**Figure 13:** The famed Tito statue in Kumrovec, May 2008.

Many months later, on a fickle Saturday morning of August 7, 2010, I found myself in front of the office of the Josip Broz Tito Society in Banja Luka, waiting to board the bus that the organization had commissioned for the trip. We were to journey westward, in the direction of a small town of Bosanska Otoka, and find our way to a river island where our Bihać hosts were throwing their party, with the apt title of "Days of Balkan Love." The younger members of the Society, including my main contact, had already departed in a private car several hours before, in order to drop off supplies and help with the organizers with logistics. Aside from the Chapter's president, who I interviewed a few weeks before, and the secretary with whom I conversed only briefly, I did not know anyone else. It was my first journey with the Banja Luka Titoists, yet despite the unknown faces, the sights and the routine were absolutely familiar: the shouting and crossing names off the lists, the occasional sight of socialist iconography, the red scarves and shirts thoughtfully chosen for the occasion, and the frantic accounting of all the things that needed to be brought along on the bus.

As I was among the last to board, I ended up sitting in the right corner seat of the very last row of the bus. Next to me, sat a gregarious, energetic man in his late 60s, also named "Milan," who was only too happy to strike up a conversation. Before we departed, I learned that Milan joined the Society because he was looking for a good way to spend his time and socialize with his own peers. Milan was born in Drvar but moved to the town of Banja Luka just on the eve of the devastating earthquake that hit the city in 1969, the memory of which was still vivid in his mind. He spent most of his working life in the local Secretariat of internal affairs, the one governmental agency in socialist Yugoslavia that seemed in charge of everything that mattered, from issuing IDs and residence permits to spying on suspicious activities. "Supovci" as they were often colloquially described, were men with a certain aura of authority and entitlement rumored to be tough and ideological hard-liners. But in fact, many of the people employed at these municipal secretariats did routine jobs, as bureaucrats pushing small cogs of much larger machinery.

After retiring, Milan had also gotten divorced (at his age, people do not try as hard to stand one another, he said). His children were busy trying to make ends meet. His daughter emigrated in the war, and his son had his own family to take care of in Banja Luka. He was living in a small apartment, filling his time volunteering as a sports referee and taking field trips with his own township government [*mjesna zajednica*], as well as with the Josip Broz Tito society. He was curious about why I was traveling to the gathering and was markedly confused when I told him I was in fact from Sarajevo but spending time in Banja Luka doing research. He was glad to talk to me in the context of my research, but I could sense he was puzzled about one thing in particular: was I or was I not, Serb? As the day unraveled it became clear to me he had decided I was, regardless of the fact I told him directly that I was not. Throughout our journey though the picturesque Krajina landscape, he mapped out for me the ethnic geography of lands we passed: these here to the left were Serb villages, these other to the right, Croat, and further yet, Muslim. I was struck by the easiness with which he described these spaces solely and definitively in terms of ethnic belonging, until I realized that to him such logics seemed perfectly natural and unproblematic. This perhaps reflected more his age and world view, rather than gave a clear indication of his politics--which, as it would turn out, was as full of paradoxes as the day that lied ahead. Half way through the journey, he told me his brother had been married to a Muslim woman, but that since his marriage had dissolved. To make the situation even stranger, his former sister in law was sitting a few rows down with another female friend who Milan said was also Muslim. Milan and his brother's former wife never said a word to each other, although Milan hinted to me that the whole situation was difficult and complicated.

Outside of the circle of our conversation, the passengers on the bus were busy chatting away among themselves, sharing the latest news and showing each other photographs from previous travels with the Society. Soon after departure, someone gave the driver one of the cassette tapes with songs about Tito, and everyone joined in the song. The group of men in the back, to which I was the most proximate, brought out a bottle of homemade brandy and started passing it around. The pungent smell of alcohol filled the air while the noises became more expressive. After some two hours of driving and one short stop along the way, we arrived in front of the small river island with a medium size restaurant complex where our Bihać hosts were waiting for us. There, we encountered at the entrance a large red flag of the Communist Party and a smaller Venezuelan flag signifying support for Chavez's second wave socialism. Two young guys from Bihać sold Partizan beer for 1 convertible mark, while another older gentlemen from the Banja Luka JBT Society sought to raise funds for the organization through the sale of

caps and T-shirts with Tito's image. Although this manifestation was clearly much smaller than the one in Kumrovec, all the essential elements were there. New busses of invited Titoist groups from all across former Yugoslavia, as far as Montenegro and Istria, continued to arrive, increasing the number of flags anchored and displayed to at once symbolize unity and fragmentation left behind by the 1990s. Friends and acquaintances hugged each other, exchanging greetings and compliments. At some point, the organizers gave a welcoming speech, which was followed by a rather extraordinary show by a singer and belly dancer hired for the occasion, who in the pauses between her renditions of "Comrade Tito, We Swear to You" performed her own "orientalist" choreographies. As her neon green costume decorated with fake silver coins flew and shook, the crowd went wild from excitement.



**Figure 14:** Welcome banner of organizing committee of the "Days of Balkan Love." Bosanska Otoka, Summer 2010.

As I went around exploring my ethnographic terrain, I noticed among visitors a woman with a *hidžab*, the veil worn by Muslims to indicate religious piety. Around her neck hang the red polyester scarf of the Bihać JBT Society, which the other hosts were also spotting. I was immediately drawn to her readiness to combine symbols of religious piety and longing for socialism. She joined the other dancers, staying particularly close to another woman who had arrived on one of the buses from the Croatian Istria. Eventually, when I got to talk to her, I learned that "Fadila" was in her early fifties and that Broz was her hero ever since she was a little child. She continued to believe in the values he promoted even though she became intensely religious and decided to veil in late 1980s. Sensing my puzzlement over her ability to reconcile what seemed to be contradictory orientations, she told me that as a person, she was interested in all things good. And Tito, she said, was good. Next to her stood "Ivanka," who introduced herself to me loudly, using a pejorative term "officirušā", reserved for the wives of high ranking officers of Yugoslav National Army. Immediately after that, she described herself using a much more dramatic and violent phrase "Chetnik whore." Ivanka explained that as a Croat, she married a Serb officer with whom he had "three wonderful children and a wonderful life", but that in the



early 1990s, her radicalizing surroundings in Croatia ostracized her for having “betrayed the nation”. “But I don’t care,” she exclaimed, “because I know what is important in life.” She then proceeded to explain that everything would be fine with friends such as Fadila and her comrades that had gathered on that day on a small river island on the bank of river Una. As Fadila and Ivanka danced away their *Kozaračko kolo*, it occurred to me that no single thesis statement about Yugonostalgia would ever be able to adequately capture the complexities of post-Yugoslav memories and attachments that played out in these settings.

It would be difficult to say that sites such as these are locations of some kind of hope for the future, though they definitely have some potential. During the day, I met a wide-eyed, 18 year old Miloš from Banja Luka, who had come along to the party with other youngsters from the JBT Society. At some point, he told me whisperingly: “You know, this is my first time in Bosnia”. I laughed and asked him whether or not he was born in Banja Luka. He quickly clarified his statement, and said he meant Federation. To my next question about whether or not it was any different, he responded, no and then quickly said “I like it.” I thought and continue to think about this encounter, which laid bare both the limits and potentialities of such events and the concomitant forms of sociality and belonging that they enable. His factually inaccurate mapping which placed his hometown outside of Bosnia, in fact revealed another type of geopolitical imagination found among a significant number of residents of Republika Srpska, according to which Bosnia-Herzegovina begins where the Dayton imposed entity line ends. His “mistake” illuminated the existence of a normalized discursive frame, a way of understanding and talking about the world, which cast doubt on whether any type of inter-national unity in Bosnia can be made possible again. But yet, the fact he was there among the Titoists from all across Bosnia and former Yugoslavia, left open the possibility that he would pave his own path, form his own opinions and be able to imagine a different way of talking and living that is not completely over-determined by nationalist logic.



**Figure 15:** Women dancing Kozaračko kolo, Bosanska Otoka, Summer 2010.

On the way back to Banja Luka, in early evening hours, our bus driver decided to make another stop in the small town of Omarska, near Prijedor, which in 1992 became infamous as the site of a Serb concentration camp for local Muslims and Croats. We stopped by the Motel and

Restaurant “Evropa” whose quaint setting and name completed the mosaic of contradictions I encountered that day. After we boarded the bus, I went back to my seat next to Milan, who had been drinking and was clearly tired. Earlier that day, during the performance of one revolutionary song, I saw him crying. He told me his parents were Partisans from Drvar<sup>35</sup> who were proud to have taken part in the resistance and proud of the country which arose out of that victory. Just on the outskirts of Banja Luka, the bus stopped and his former sister in law and her friend, got off to continue on foot. As they left, he called them “budas” a colloquial and in that context pejorative term for veiled Muslim women. He then turned to me and said: “Never again will I live with them. Never!” At that point, it was not clear to me whether Milan never caught on to the fact I was one of “them” or whether he decided, according to some other logic, that I was not. What was clear was that that Milan’s attitude towards the shared Yugoslav past and the values that were constitutive of it remained fraught with paradoxes, ambivalences and uncertainties. I never found out the reason for his anger, since I could not bring myself to challenge him and ask about what he cried for earlier that day in light of the moment I just witnessed. Soon after, we said our goodbyes.

If there is anything to be learned from these ethnographic vignettes I have described above, it is that gatherings of Yugonostalgics are as much about forward oriented hope situated in alternative forms of belonging as they are about ongoing struggle to define a new political language adequate to the postwar moment. Practices of collective nostalgia enable certain forms of mobility and contestation but also reveal the painful impasses created by the remapping of the borders these busses cross in order to bring people together. As such, they are a promising terrain for exploration of practices, rhetoric and paradoxes of ex-Yugoslav postsocialism, but also places where both potentials and limits of the past’s presence in the present become the most visible.

### *Conclusion*

This second chapter has traversed a great deal of historical and geographic space in order to inquire into past and present uses of political and social technologies for (re)disciplining subjects and their loyalties. I have focused on the town of Jajce, my second most prominent field site and a monument rich central Bosnian town, which the war transformed into a graveyard of the socialist revolution. In the first part, I described the political grid created by wartime campaigns of ethnic cleansing and postwar efforts to create an ethnic democracy, showing how efforts to clearly demarcate difference, political loyalty and belonging produce their own contradictions and ambivalences. Attending to these multiple histories and the micro-dynamics of power in what was once the cradle of the socialist state, I have been asking what it might mean to live through the end of the world, to pick up the pieces and fight to secure a livable life? What forms of sociality, personhood and everyday politics emerge in the fraught processes of postwar reconstruction and reform? And what may be the status and role of the socialist era experiences in this divisive present?

In a sense, this chapter has moved between three, in different ways disruptive figures of a nationalist, an opportunist and a nostalgic. As should be clear from the ethnographic accounts of

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<sup>35</sup> Drvar is also a site of a major WWII battle, precipitated by a huge Nazi offensive aimed at destroying the Partisan troops under the leadership of Tito. Today, Yugonostalgics gather in Drvar few times a year to mark the anniversary of the battle and sometimes also celebrate locally the Day of Youth.

Zeko, Zlata and Bogdanka's predicaments, and the story of two Milans, these three figures spill out and into each other, each one providing a new set of problematizations of the politics of impasse. It is impossible to reduce either one of these people to such stock types; rather I offer these three figures as devices for thinking political life in Bosnia as an effect of exercises of power and enduring, at times clashing, epistemologies that make possible acquiescence to or suspension of such disciplinary operations. The next chapter takes this effort further, by considering the fate and renewed political force of another aspect of Yugoslav socialist period—the specter of normal life.

## CHAPTER 3: AFTERLIVES OF THE SOCIALIST SANTA: PEDAGOGIES, AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF “NORMAL LIFE”

At the doorstep of the 2008 winter holiday season, a contentious decision of the superintendent of public kindergartens in Sarajevo swept up the attention of the press, participants in various internet forums, cultural commentators, and parents in the entire country and beyond its borders. In the center of the newly formed public and unusual political storm resided a children’s character popularized during socialism, bearing the name of Deda Mraz [transl. “Grandpa Frost”]. The controversy ignited when Arzija Mahmutović, the pious and veiled Bosniak director of city’s 24 kindergartens<sup>1</sup>, publicly admitted to having issued a directive to the teachers to not put together the customary winter gift giving ceremonies featuring Deda Mraz. She justified her decision by explaining that some Muslim parents opposed the continuation of this socialist era holiday practice on the grounds it was not a part of their cultural, religious and ethnic tradition (Arnautović 2008; see also Marković 2009 and Šehabović 2009)<sup>2</sup>.

This explanation appeared strange, since New Year’s gift-giving ceremonies featuring Deda Mraz had been a childhood staple in Bosnia-Herzegovina for over sixty years, continuing even after the dissolution of the Yugoslav socialist state that originally introduced them. Deda Mraz, this “communist Santa Claus”, as he was christened by the late Croatian ethnologist, Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, became an official part of winter holidays in socialist Yugoslavia immediately after the Second World War, at the time when the Yugoslav political avant-garde used as inspiration the practices of their Soviet counterparts, among which could be found the New Year’s gift giver, “Ded Moroz.”<sup>3</sup> As a figure formed out of an amalgam of regional folkloric influences, religious Christmas celebrations, shifting socialist era holiday practices, and eventually also the influence of Western media and capitalist imaginaries,<sup>4</sup> Deda Mraz

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<sup>1</sup> Mahmutović is the director of the public institution formally named “Djeca Sarajeva” [trans. “Children of Sarajevo”], which manages publicly owned kindergartens [*obdaništa*, bs. sr; *vrtići*, hr.]. These institutions welcome children of a range of ages, and often include nursery sections, daycares, and preschools. Hence, their task is to at once provide pedagogical, educational, socializing and caretaking services to parents, under the auspices of the state. “Children of Sarajevo” is supervised and managed by the government of the Canton of Sarajevo, one of the ten federal units in the Muslim-Croat Federation. It has a Board of Directors, it reports to the Ministry of Education and Science in the Cantonal Government and is financed through the cantonal budget and parental contributions.

<sup>2</sup> Director Mahmutović made the argument concerning the clash of traditions on multiple occasions; it gained the widest prominence and circulation during an episode of a talk show “Pošteno,” hosted by a prominent journalist Duška Jurišić and dedicated to the Deda Mraz Affair. The guests in the studio were among others, Arzija Mahmutović and Mladen Jelčić Troka, a Bosnian actor famous for dressing up as Deda Mraz for over thirty years. I discuss the particularities of this show in later sections of this chapter. The show aired on December 5, 2008, on the public broadcasting channel, Federalna Televizija (FTV), known for its antinationalist and critical stance on political issues.

<sup>3</sup> In the Russian context, Ded Moroz presented a secular alternative to the Saint Nicolas, Bishop of Myra, venerated in both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox tradition. It also has origins in Russian folklore, notably the fairy tale “Father Frost” which is the origin of moral and pedagogical character of Ded Moroz. Father Frost is a parable on the importance of moral behavior and kindness to others. According to Linda DeLaine of the magazine *Russian Life*: “Unlike the Western Santa Claus, Ded Moroz typically is a tall, slender gentleman with a long white beard. He would wear long, lavishly adorned robes of red and gold. Often, Ded Moroz would be depicted in a costume very similar to a bishop’s clerical garb; red cossack, white lace surplice, long red cope with gold adornment and the tall, pointed Bishop’s hat. During the Soviet Era, Ded Moroz’s robes were usually a light blue. His home is a log house in the wooded village of Viliky Ustyug, Vologodskaya region in northern Russia about 500 miles northeast of Moscow. Ded Moroz travels, of course, in a troika; a decorated sleigh drawn by three horses. He is assisted by *Snegurochka* (the Snow Maiden) who, it is said, is Ded Moroz’s granddaughter” (DeLaine 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Yugoslav “Grandpa Frost” was in some way different Ded Moroz. Notably, he was never accompanied by the *Snegurochka*, nor was his house in a northern Russian village. He was in fact an amalgam of several different personages, including Soviet Ded Moroz, Catholic and Orthodox St. Nicholas, Božić Bata (a character from Serbian folklore), and of course, the modern Western Santa Claus, who has since the 1930s been dressed up in red and white thanks to the Coca Cola Company (Rihtman-Auguštin 1997; 2000). Contemporary Deda Mraz is virtually indistinguishable from Santa—he wears the same costume and is reported to

nevertheless embodies a distinctive, communist answer to Santa Claus and its predecessor, St. Nicolas. Despite his familiar look and responsibilities as the magical gift provider who visits children during winter holidays, Deda Mraz is associated in the context of former Yugoslavia with the secular New Year holidays, and not with Christmas celebrations.

As was common throughout Eastern Europe, during the early stages of its political takeover, Yugoslav communist leadership transformed many of the religious rites and symbols of Christmas, such as St. Nicolas and the fir tree decoration, into icons of the state sponsored celebrations of the New Year (Sklevicky 1989; Rihtman-Auguštin 1997; 2000). In this way, previously exclusive ethnic and communal rituals were stripped off their religious connotation, reinterpreted and became a part of shared, interethnic and secular celebrations, sanctioned by the state. Instead of on Christmas Eve, the children now received gifts on the new date, December 28, the newly proclaimed unofficial holiday called the “Day of Children’s Joy” [Dan dječije radosti] (Sklevicky 1989). In the first decade of Yugoslav socialism, Deda Mraz and the state sponsored distributions of standardized New Year’s packages<sup>5</sup> became a crucial aspect of this newly invented holiday occasion and a matter of state policy. These practices also made Deda Mraz distinct from Santa Claus: while the pedagogical aspect of the holiday gift giving was exercised in both the West and the East, Deda Mraz did not visit children clandestinely, but during public manifestations organized by the state and in various institutional settings including kindergartens, schools, Houses of Culture and eventually state owned factories and enterprises where parents were employed. Importantly, despite the end of socialism, such rites lingered on even in the postwar period, perpetuated and put together by public institutions, such as kindergartens and local governments, but also through private initiatives of parents and even local citizens’ associations.

Director Mahmutović’s 2008 decision, and her seemingly disingenuous explanation, produced a veritable avalanche of responses, accusations and acts of political protest, which continued for several years after the original controversy. A year before her contested Deda Mraz ban, the public kindergartens in Sarajevo had emerged as an intense site of debate because of the decision to begin optional religious instruction for children that many deemed too young for such programs. The echoes of these previous debates reverberated through the new scandal in multiple ways. The controversy gained such force that it made news not only in regional but also international media, having been featured in the *Observer* (the weekend edition of the *Guardian*)<sup>6</sup> and subsequently reported through many other outlets. Lacking in proper historical context, many such reports folded the events surrounding this controversy into the rubric of increasing Islamization of Bosnian society, embodied in the figure of veiled director who stood behind the expulsion of “Santa” from the public kindergartens. While questions pertaining to the

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come from the North Pole. However, some marked regional differences exist. In Croatia, Deda Mraz is increasingly associated with Christmas. In a personal communication, Slovenian ethnologist, Nina Vodopivec shared with me that Slovenian Deda Mraz is said to descend from Mount Triglav, and wear a distinct white costume.

<sup>5</sup> The content of these packages ranged substantially, depending on the time period and the regional means and specificities. My informants report that throughout the 1960s, children received pieces of exotic fruit, such as the mandarins in these packages. During the 1980s, such gift packages [*paketići*] usually contained one bigger and usually gendered toy, along with a lot of candy, chocolate and cookies, manufactured by Yugoslav factories. State owned firms and institutions routinely organized holiday manifestations with Deda Mraz and provided gifts bas for the children of their employees. While the contents of these celebrations varied (Sklevicky reports early ceremonies included visits and speeches by Communist officials, a practice that was eventually abandoned), virtually everyone born between the two wars has a childhood photograph with a man with a fake white beard, dressed in red and white costume.

<sup>6</sup> Subsequent translations of this article appeared in the Bosnian shortly after.



transforming place of religious piety in public life indeed formed a powerful aspect of the issue, the ensuing reactions of Sarajevan public suggest something far more complicated was at hand.

In this chapter, I show how the “socialist Santa” controversy brought to light social and ethical concerns about public education and proper forms of childrearing, which are irreducible to the issues of postwar desecularization. The majority of my own interlocutors, as well as participants in the public discussions about the issue, passionately defended the figure of Deda Mraz as universally positive, apolitical and unthreatening to any one particular religious or ethnic tradition. By contrast, they saw the campaign to do away with traditional New Year’s holiday festivities, as at once absurd and potentially extremely politically dangerous. The attempted purge of the popular winter gift-giver became interpreted as an nationalistically orchestrated effort to introduce new pedagogies and new norms among young children, who were to be remade into persons to whom nationally conscious and exclusivist form of personhood and sociality were inherent. Consequently, the affair exploded the already prevalent concerns over violent remapping of social norms and the very understanding of the category of “normal” that was ushered in by the war.

Crucially, these events also rendered palpable something that is often difficult to see in post-war Bosnia: the complex social—and not necessarily ethnically defined—divisions concerning the interpretations of the socialist era experiences and their continued political relevance in the post-war era.<sup>7</sup> The Deda Mraz controversy brought into foreground disarticulated and often self-contradicting ideological shifts that have marked the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent remapping of multiethnic Bosnia. At this chapter shows, the affair conjured up complex questions about lived histories and public attitudes concerning socialism, while situating at the forefront of public debates predicaments of education, parenting, and proper management of public institutions. In other words, the affair opened up a densely packed “problem-space,” an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes...hangs” (Scott 2005, 3-4).<sup>8</sup>

What role then might Deda Mraz’s dynamic reappearance and mobilization as a political and ideological symbol perform in the context of Bosnia’s ongoing political struggles to define an acceptable, shared future? Posing such a question is vital for understanding both the stakes of the “Deda Mraz Affair”—the concert of events, mobilizations and interventions produced by his attempted “expulsion” from the kindergartens in Sarajevo—and the unique insights that the Bosnian situation brings to anthropology of postsocialism. Ultimately, this chapter argues that in the independent Bosnia, revalorization of certain Yugoslav era values, in particular the re-imagining and preservation of socialist multinationalism and its symbolic practices, often becomes seen as crucial for keeping alive not only the dream of a better, inhabitable future, but also the prospects of a future unified Bosnian state.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, the Deda Mraz controversy brought together many other important issues, including most prominently questions of religious and ethnic identity, nature of “tradition” as well as debates about the proper place of religion in politics and institutional life. In this chapter, however, I chose to focus on the ways this socialist era figure sparked antinationalist political argument demanding recognition and affirmation of practices that could still be enjoyed by all youngsters irrespectively of their ethnic and religious background.

<sup>8</sup> I borrow this formulation from anthropologist David Scott (2004) who sees problem space as a historically contingent context characterized by dispute and the existence of rival views. Different historical conjunctures give rise to different conceptual-ideological problem-spaces; hence, questions that may be worth asking at one time, may no longer have the same force in a different moment. I treat post-Dayton Bosnia as one such context of conjecture, where new political arguments are equally enabled by old ideological formulations and new social and institutional situations.

<sup>9</sup> While the Dayton Accords ended the war in Bosnia and managed to preserve the nominal sovereignty and unity of the independent Bosnian state, the agreement also partitioned the country into territorial units inhabited and governed by ethnic groups and their nationalistic elites. The consolidation of these ethno-territorial entities was accomplished through wartime

I begin by exploring the initial emergence of the Deda Mraz controversy, tracing ethnographically the rich and varied responses his “exile” provoked in Sarajevo and the rest of Bosnia. I trace the various historical transformations of this figure, in an effort to show how an invented socialist tradition became a largely depoliticized part of everyday life during late socialism, only to reemerge again as a powerful symbol of normal life in the postwar period. The subsequent sections of this chapter explore in fine ethnographic detail other interventions emerging around Deda Mraz. These include a fascinating and ultimately botched artistic campaign utilizing another socialist era symbol—the mascot of the 1984 Olympics in Sarajevo, an animated rendition of the baby mountain wolf named Vučko—as a way of rendering visible the perceived “absurdity” of Deda Mraz’s banishment. Secondly, I examine in particular how the Deda Mraz Affair brought into public eye and made stronger ongoing struggles of a group of parents in one particular Sarajevan kindergarten who were opposed to the managerial practices of the controversial director Mahmutović. Through these cases, I show how contemporary Sarajevans, amidst their public mobilizations and creative forms of play with ideology sought to reassert the importance of Yugoslav socialist values amidst Bosnia’s slow and painful postwar reconstruction. Be they artists, parents or activists, they located within those aesthetic and ethical repertoires not only their personal convictions but also values which they saw as necessary for the restoration of something most Bosnians lost with the fall of socialism—a possibility of a more desirable future.

### *The Deda Mraz Affair: How the Socialist Santa Claus Started a Struggle for the National Future*

The attempted exile of Deda Mraz set in motion an avalanche of thunderous condemnations and emphatic defenses, circulated through newspaper articles, public commentaries, satirical cartoons, TV talk shows, Facebook groups, campaigns of local NGOs, acts of parental advocacy and various random political interventions.<sup>10</sup> While it lasted, the debate produced a record number of reader comments on the nation’s most popular online news portal, Sarajevo-X.com, whose internet server crashed due to the sheer volume of visits. While most visitors there defended the figure of Deda Mraz, some argued that he posed a problem in relation to Islamic tradition, not only because of his idolatrous nature but also because of his

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campaigns of ethnic cleansing and postwar exchanges of property and real estate. In 1996, Dayton was supposed to be a transient solution, with a new, more permanent arrangement to be established once wartime animosities had been put under control (Bieber 2006). But instead of normalization, political discourse and relations have since 2006 been marked by increasing nationalist bickering and inability to reach political consensus on matters of crucial importance, such as constitutional reform. In 2007, amidst proclamations by Bosniak leader, Haris Silajdžić, that Republika Srpska was created through genocide and should be abolished, the leader of Bosnian Serbs, Milorad Dodik started threatening with a referendum for the Serb entity’s independence. While Bosniak leaders ultimately wish to see Bosnian state institutions strengthened, Bosnian Serb leaders have instead been systematically working on undermining centralization and preserving decision making power at the entity level. Bosnian Croats, though a power-sharing arrangement with Bosniaks in the Federation, have been oscillating between advocating increased centralization and abolishment of entities, and advocating the creation of a third, Croat entity. This complex nationalist stalemate (which I do not have time to explain in an adequate manner) has led to increase in anxieties over the very future of Bosnia.

<sup>10</sup> Among the avalanche of articles and commentary published in 2008, I will single out: “Opet Bez Djeda Mraza” [Again without Deda Mraz], by E. Hromo, *Oslobodenje* Dec 14; “Djed Mraz može u Vrtiće” (Deda Mraz can go to kindergartens), *Oslobodenje*, Dec 27, 2009; “Mraz” [Frost] by Faruk Borić, *Oslobodenje*, Dec. 29; *Zabrane su neprihvatljive* [The Ban is unacceptable], *Oslobodenje*, Dec 29; “Djeda Mraz: Postoji li, odakle je došao i šta hoće?” [Deda Mraz: Does he exist, where does he come from and what does he want?], by Vedrana Seksan, *Gracija*, Dec. In addition to this commentary, two Left oriented parties in Sarajevo, Social Democrats and the recently formed, progressive and antinationalist party *Naša Stranka* (Our Party), both issued statements condemning the banishment of Deda Mraz in mid December. In 2009, as the controversy was again reignited, there was another wave of critical commentary, which I will discuss and reference in latter parts of the chapter.

resemblance to St Nicholas and link to Christian religious celebrations. Other critics expressed concerns with his communist era origins, and denied the legitimacy of Deda Mraz from the position of secular Bosnian nationalism, arguing that the independent, democratic Bosnia should leave behind such socialist nonsense. A number of commentators raised issue with Deda Mraz's similarity to Santa Claus, which they saw as a capitalist fabrication, proliferated by Coca Cola, with no connection to any "organic" tradition. And another, more pragmatic fraction wondered whether Bosnians had much more important things to worry about, namely, the hardcore political issues including constitutional reform, EU accession and the looming economic crisis.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 16:** A satirical meme from the internet that circulated in the Bosnian cybersphere under the title "This is how Deda Mraz is coming to Sarajevo this year"

By contrast, the "defenders" voiced concerns over what they saw as Mahmutović's own ideological and political agenda, springing from her personal religious convictions and suspected ties to Bosniak nationalist and Islamic clerical elites. One portion of the public attacked especially her argument that Deda Mraz was not a part of Bosniak tradition, by pointing to the ubiquitous presence of holiday practices associated with him in personal biographies, family albums and the lived histories of everyday life. But there was one particular aspect of her decision that stood out to many parents: the fact she was attacking a tradition, which because of its secular and presumably apolitical content, in the aftermath of Bosnia's terrible war still had the potential to bring together and be shared by the children of different ethnic backgrounds.

The suspicions over the motivations of Mahmutović's decision were amplified as a result of her earlier advocacy of optional religious instruction in kindergartens. Such classes, targeting mostly Bosniak kindergarteners, which formed the majority of students in the city, were sneaked into the curriculum a mere year earlier, after a limited circulation of questionnaires among selected parents. Because these courses were initially only offered to Bosniak (Muslim) children, their organization resulted in temporary segregation of non-attending children (non-

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<sup>11</sup> I sorted out these "families of arguments" after following in detail the debates that emerged on the portals and forums of Sarajevo-x.com, discussion boards of various Facebook groups, and talking to my informants in Sarajevo and Jajce. I recount the most memorable TV segments and specific ethnographic encounters related to this topic in later parts of the chapter.

Muslim but also Bosniak children whose parents opted out) as small as three years old within the context of a public educational and caretaking institution. In fact, much of the local activism that emerged in and around this affair, focused on Mahmutović's history of unilateral decision making which had earned her enemies among a significant number of parents whose children attended the state kindergartens. In response to this, an informal group of parents whose children attended public kindergartens came together to attempt to monitor the work of the education administrators, including Mahmutović herself. This group of parents also brought the "Deda Mraz" controversy to the attention of the media, hoping that a public outcry against Mahmutović's attack on a beloved practice would help their greater cause.



**Figure 17:** As a commentary on the alleged involvement of Islamic clerical elites in the entire project of “banning” Deda Mraz, magazine *Dani* [Days] used as a cover a photomontage of the Grand Mufti Cerić, the head of the Bosnian Islamic Community, dressed up as a Deda Mraz. Photo courtesy of Dani.

As the controversy grew in the course of a month long debate, Mahmutović claimed in the media that any kindergarten in her administration, if it was so desired, would offer

opportunities for parents to independently organize Deda Mraz visits for their children. However, she also asserted that under the new, post-war laws defending religious rights and freedoms of expression, such celebrations could not be made mandatory like they were in the communist period. This statement provided the most interesting and illuminating aspect of Mahmutović's argument, one that also poses the greatest challenge to the "Islamization" thesis. Director Mahmutović articulated her opposition against a socialist era symbol not on theological grounds, but through discourses of tolerance, ideological pluralism, and multiculturalism, all of which stem from postwar projects of reconstruction and reform that promote liberal conceptualizations of religious freedom. However, while Mahmutović's rhetoric appeared liberal, her actions spoke a different language. Subsequent experiences of some of the parents of kindergarten children revealed that contrary to Mahmutović's claims, organizing Deda Mraz's visits was not so easy. The parents in one of the "rebellious" kindergartens in the end staged a coup with a help of a member of a friendly NGO who himself dressed up as Deda Mraz. On the day of the "invasion", the teachers were initially not allowing the parents and children inside in spite of the cold weather (presumably, this was a directive from Mahmutović herself). When the rebellious parents and the guerilla Deda Mraz decided to enact their gift giving ceremony in the front yard lawn, the teachers let them inside, ultimately helping accomplish the mission of returning Deda Mraz into the kindergarten!

What is more, during this period, several other groups, including the Social Democratic Party and some NGOs, used the cause of Deda Mraz to push forth their own agenda. Members of "Citizen Action," on which much of this dissertation is focused, dressed up their special props (which I discuss at length in the last chapter) the giant, grotesque heads of the nationalist politicians and then High Representative, Miroslav Lajčák<sup>12</sup> in Deda Mraz costumes, and distributed to passers-by black garbage bags filled with scraps as gifts for the New Year. In this way, they were simultaneously trying to show the perceived silliness of Deda Mraz's banishment, and provide a critique of the government and its broken promises. The choice to hold up the New Year as a moment of collective reflection and evaluation recalled similar socialist era policies, where the annual occasion was used not only as a moment of self-examination but also as an opportunity to announce plans for the future. During early years of socialism, New Year festivities were combined with political speeches and progress reports, becoming a part of the state arsenal used to harness the calendrics of everyday life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Lajčák, a soft-spoken Czech diplomat, did not get much done during his mandate, and resigned last year in order to take a position as the Czech minister of foreign affairs. He was replaced by a former Austrian ambassador to Bosnia, Valentin Incko.

<sup>13</sup> There is a long and rich anthropological literature on time reckoning and the calendrics of everyday life in different cultural contexts (see Gell 1992, Munn 1992). Cultural historians such as E.P. Thomson (1967), most notably, have traced the ways in which seizure of time by capitalist modes of production has transformed subjectivities and experience of modern life. Pushing these arguments further, David Harvey (1989) argues that late capitalist modes of production are characterized by flexible regimes of accumulation that demand not only shortening of geographic distances but acceleration of time. In the socialist and postsocialist settings, the argument about time as a historical and social category has most persuasively been made by Katherine Verdery (1996), who in Chapter 2 of her book, *What was socialism and What Comes Next?*, entitled "Etatization of Time" develops an argument that the socialist state sought to seize time from its citizen subjects by for example keeping them at work even when there was no work to be done. In recent years, scholars of postsocialism have also been interested in leisure as a type of ordering of time, starting with Anagnost 1997.





**Figure 18:** Activists of Citizen Action stage a street provocation featuring grotesque head puppets of nationalist politicians dressed up as Deda Mraz’s. Sarajevo, December 2008. Photo courtesy of Inga Geko.

Seeking to capitalize on these events, the Social Democratic Party (SDP)—which at the time was in the Opposition in the joint Muslim-Croat Federal entity government, but only two months earlier took the control of the City of Sarajevo in 2008 local elections—fashioned itself into the official protector of Deda Mraz. On December 28, 2008, the “Day of Children’s Joy,” the youth wing of the local SDP, in cooperation with a number of sympathetic non-governmental organizations, and with support of the group of the kindergarten parents, staged a protest in favor of return of Deda Mraz. The following morning, *Oslobođenje*, the daily paper friendly to the social democrats, ran the photographs with an accompanying article prefaced by a bolded title “Deda Mraz for the Children, Recall Elections for the Veterans.” The clever set up suggested that children needed gifts from Deda Mraz to start the New Year on a promising note, while the veterans who were already frustrated with their position in the postwar Bosnian state, would be best served by a new election—one that would provide the Social Democrats with a much coveted victory at the national level.

In addition to these publicly visible forms of protest, Deda Mraz became a major topic of private conversations, many of which echoed commonplace complaints that something was deeply wrong with Bosnian society. After the publication of the article in the British *Observer*, several of my interlocutors in Sarajevo expressed their embarrassment, especially because the news about the Santa-ban came out only a few months after the violent backlash against the first Queer Festival in Sarajevo.<sup>14</sup> Many European news sources similarly interpreted this violence as

<sup>14</sup> Queer fest was a series of cultural events dedicated to issues of import to the local LGBT community, which was scheduled to take place in September 2008, in the middle of the Islamic month of fast, Ramadan. The festival was violently interrupted after a surprising coalition made out of the followers of Selafl teaching (a more radical form of Islamic theology and practice, also known as Wahhabism), football hooligans and random groups of young men, attacked a number of attendees of the opening exhibit. In many ways, the backlash was enabled and staged by the media witch-hunt propagated by the popular, but conservative Bosniak newspaper, *Dnevni Avaz*, which claimed that the manifestation was a provocation to Muslims during the month of Ramadan.

an alleged sign of growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia. Forty-five year old Alma remarked that Deda Mraz was a “normal part of the holiday season here, just like in rest of Europe.” By “banning” him, Bosnians were in some way denying not only their own lived tradition, but rejecting universal holiday practices which testified to their inherent “Europeanness” and cosmopolitan spirit. Interestingly, both my informants and the editors at *Observer*, used the terms Deda Mraz and Santa Claus interchangeably, evacuating the regional, ideological and political differences between these figures, and merging them into a single universal.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, Mahmutović argued that the majority of the world’s children who are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or belonging to some other religious tradition did not expect visits from any such fantasy figures during the holiday season. Both defenders and critics then sought external vantage points for legitimization of their pro- and anti- Deda Mraz positions, suggesting that “discourses on the normal” (Fehérváry 2002) were non-only intensely localized and context bound, but often incorporated and made use of imagined global standards.



**Figure 19:** Another internet meme in the form of a fake public death notice for Deda Mraz. The grieving parties identified here are Coca Cola Company, Vatican, St. Nick, Social Democratic Party, and the viewers of the investigative TV show “60 minutes”

<sup>15</sup> Santa Claus has inspired its own share of controversies throughout Western Europe and North America, which I cannot examine here in any meaningful detail. Most famously in 1951, French priests in the Dijon burned a Pere Noel doll as a protest against the increasing presence of American influence in Christmas celebrations, but also in society at large. This incident inspired a text by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss that I discuss in later parts of this text. Levi-Strauss re-imagined Santa as an object of anthropological interest because of its role in kinship relations. Gift giving of children originated in the beliefs that new generations carried on spirits of ancestors who had to then be appeased by being offered bribes. Other anthropologists, notably Julian Steward in 1931 and Eric Wolf in 1964, also analyzed Santa Claus as an aspect of modern American culture that could be used as a prism for making sense of larger economic and social processes. Wolf instated that American Santa Claus, despite being inspired by the Bishop of Myra, had little in common with his religious antecedent, but presented instead an invented American mythology, designed by illustrator Thomas Nast in the 1837 (Wolf 1964, 150). Its primary purpose, Wolf insists, was to act as a “part and parcel of an ideological system governing relations between children and adults” (151), in which the rules and inequalities of capitalism are supplanted by a utopian dream that all children will be rewarded for their good deeds. Santa, in this formulation, is a rather conservative figure, invented to legitimate the existing order of things. For more information on the emergence of Christmas celebrations in the United States, see collection *Unwrapping Christmas* (Miller, ed 1993).

While Mahmutović might have been right about the global relevance of winter holiday celebrations,<sup>16</sup> in doing away with the habitual distribution of winter gift packages in 2008, she was breaking with a sixty-year-long holiday tradition from the socialist era, still fondly remembered and now promoted by many adult Bosnians. Generations of children grew up amidst cycles of annual gift giving and holiday gatherings, which despite socialism's end, continued well into the postwar period. Through the decades, Deda Mraz developed throughout Yugoslavia into a beloved character that invoked positive memories of a happier and more carefree time. By late socialism, Deda Mraz became disassociated from his socialist ideological roots, becoming an unremarkable, apolitical, even banal part of life. Over time, he became increasingly similar to Santa Claus—as the mythologies and aesthetic forms from the East and the West blended, Deda Mraz became a sort of a hybrid figure. Most Bosnians today would describe him to English speakers or foreigners simply as “Santa,” concomitantly expressing their conviction that even socialist Yugoslavs shared in the internationally recognized holiday practice, which proved they had claimed their place in the cosmopolitan family of nations. But their Deda Mraz forms part of a quite specific, socialist history, and is everything but an ideological and culturally neutral figure.

*New Year in a New Era: A genealogy of the (post)socialist tradition*

“There is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the ‘invention’ of tradition...However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short whether there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or supply side.” (Hobsbawm 1983 4-5).

Constructivist approaches to nation building, such as the one articulated by Eric Hobsbawm, understand traditions claiming a direct continuity with past as essentially modern fabrications, often used as tools by nation states and the ruling elites, to legitimize institutions and create a sense of social cohesion among disparate populations. As evidenced in the text quoted above, Hobsbawm insists that such practices of invention gain particular force and urgency during social upheaval and reorganization. While I acknowledge the limitations of such a disenchanting and modernist approach to “tradition,” I find Hobsbawm’s emphasis on its shifting and flexible nature relevant and useful. Since state socialisms advocated and often enacted violent breaks with the past, striving at least in theory to create a brand new society, socialist elites did not feel as acutely the pressure to link their political efforts to a suitable historic past, especially if that national past did not give sufficient evidence of proto-socialist zeal. Yet socialist states, like all others, were also keen to make use of suitable past moments, struggles and characters. Multinational socialist federations, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, routinely made use of folklore and different ethnic and cultural heritages for their modern day purposes (see Hirsch 2005, Slezkine 1994, Grant 1995, and Rihtman-Auguštin 1990).

In spite of its involvement in the study, preservation and domestication of national folklores throughout socialism, Yugoslav Communist Party (later the League of Communists)

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<sup>16</sup> As I was doing research on the topic of Santa Claus, I discovered that this holiday character has found its way to the Muslim Middle East, in particular the United Arab Emirates where he has become a novelty and an attraction.



also did not shy away from the introduction, transformation and development of novel symbolic rituals, practices and holidays, proper to the multinational and socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>17</sup> One of those holidays was the New Year, which in 1947 transformed into an annual occasion for the collective reflection on the “past successes and future tasks in reconstruction and rebuilding” of the young socialist state (Sklevicky 1989). In her wonderfully informative study of the “*New New Year*”, Croatian ethnographer and historian, Lydia Sklevicky (1989) explores the archives of the Conference for Social Activism of the Women of Croatia (KZDAZH) and the Institute for the History of Workers Movement in order to trace the processes through which a new socialist winter holiday tradition was tempered. Through the documents, meeting minutes and pamphlets written during the early years of consolidation of power in the hands of Yugoslav communists (1945-1950), she shows that the process of taking over the New Year’s Day as a socialist holiday had an intensely political character.

“New Year’s Day, the socialist holiday of the peoples of Yugoslavia, is a day of joy for all workers of our land, for on that day, we sum up the results of our labor. Every new year is one step higher in our ascent toward socialism. We are transforming ourselves from technically and culturally backward land, into an advanced, economically independent and cultured land” (KZDAZH 1948, cited in Sklevicky 1989, 4)

The tone of the pamphlet that Sklevicky quotes captures well the élan and dynamism of the early years of socialism, when the society at large was handed the task of reinventing its old, “backwards” practices, into new modes of acting and being in the world, which could move along the ascent toward socialism. Undoubtedly, an important new worldview that was to be proliferated and imposed, ever so softly on the Yugoslav population, was atheism. As Sklevicky uncovers in the course of her study, sympathetic accommodation of Christmas, which characterized the few first years of socialism (when even communists used the pathos of Christ’s birth to celebrate the Yugoslav soldier and worker), gave way to the gradual withdrawal of its presence from official channels. By 1947, Marshal Tito started to openly criticize worker absenteeism “due to various holidays” (Sklevicky 1989, 17); two years later, after the Tito-Stalin break, governments of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were criticized in Yugoslav press for their backward socialism, which allowed for religious celebrations and the use of tax revenues to build churches (18).

The engineers of the Yugoslav state preferred to help along the transformation of rites associated with Christian holidays, such as Christmas, into new practices that could legitimate the ideological narratives of socialism, while also make wintertime festivities more inclusive of other national groups in the federal state, such as Muslims, Jews and non-Christian Albanians. Crucially, the target of this transformation of winter holiday celebrations were children, who instead on the feast of St. Nicholas, from 1948 on were to be given gifts several days later, on December 28, the date chosen by communist women activists as “our new day of celebration.” The women’s organization within the party, Antifascist Council of Women, took on the task of propagating, organizing and educating the public about the new festivities related to the “Day of Children’s Joy”. In November 1949, this group identified as its mission the fast and effective

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that despite its cultivation, and institutionalization, ethnology in no way had the kind of support that the state reserved for technological sciences and various types of engineering expertise, crucial to rebuilding postwar Yugoslavia. In many ways, ethnology was a marginal discipline, which could occasionally be instrumentalized in the ideological project of socialist multinationalism. According to ethnologists, the New Year was in the Balkans a traditionally celebrated as a pagan Mediterranean festival of the rising sun.

transfer of the celebration of Christmas to the New Year's festivities, by penetrating every house and making sure that the various artifact necessary for winter celebrations were made available not for Christmas but for the New Year's (21). Modeling their political activities after Soviet experiences (22), these women also began to advocate organized, public celebrations in squares and to encourage the re-imagining of the Christmas tree as a New Year's fir tree, decorated with socialist insignia, such as the red star.

It was in this context that the figure of St. Nicholas, already familiar to many Yugoslav Christians because of its popularity in central European countries and pre-socialist presence in many bourgeois homes (Rihtman-Auguštin 2000) also became reintroduced as Deda Mraz. According to Croatian ethnologists, St. Nicholas himself was an import among Catholics in Yugoslavia, whose traditional Christmas rites did not include a male gift giver. In some parts of Croatia, the children received gifts from Lucija, who though remembered as Christian saint also had origins in pagan traditions (147). In other areas of the country, gifts were given by the figure of Little Jesus, which Rihtman-Auguštin suggests emerged out of Protestant attempts to reform Christmas and do away with the cult of St. Nicholas (148) in early modern Germany. By contrast, in Serbia, traditional gift givers included St. Nicolaus, the Bishop of Myre and an important figure in the Church, who was celebrated on December 6 and a character from regional folklore known as Božić Bata. Regardless of the figure used, the gifts tended to be modest and included mostly eatable treats. But during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, increased commercialization of life also lead to more lavish gifts. Undoubtedly, the arrival of Deda Mraz simultaneously managed to draw on, echo and undermine not one but multiple folkloric and religious traditions among the many Yugoslav nations.

In the course of the Tito-Stalin Break, Deda Mraz was almost abandoned because some of the ideological purists of the time rejected this figure on the grounds it had Stalinist origins. In fact, some members of the Central Committee publicly called him "an unsuccessful Bolshevik-clerical bastard, who does not bring anything, does not represent anyone and has never made anyone happy yet" (22). During these tumultuous times, alternatives to Deda Mraz were suggested, and included "a young girl in a picturesque national dress" and "an old Partisan who visits children to see how they guard the achievements of the struggle..." (23). Yet Deda Mraz survived the crisis ensuing from the split, even while many other persons suspected of having ties with the Soviets endured persecution and ended up as political prisoners. The alternatives never took hold and Deda Mraz remained a holiday tradition in Yugoslavia.

These early socialist efforts to reimagine New Year's as a state socialist holiday and produce shared rituals for its celebration, took on greater symbolism and political significance among Yugoslavia's ethnically mixed population. The use of secular practices and rituals, which would bring together children from a variety of backgrounds, was particularly important in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While home to majority of Yugoslav Muslims, Bosnia also had large populations of Serbs and Croats; the three dominant groups had a long and rich history of both coexistence and conflict. In light of its history and ethnically heterogeneous population, the centrally located Bosnia played during socialist era an important role as the demographic, geographic and ideological heartland of Yugoslav socialism. It provided the literal battleground for the socialist revolution and the anti-fascist struggle, because most of military fighting between the Yugoslav partisans and Nazi occupiers actually took place in this mountainous and secluded region, whose terrain was suitable for guerilla resistance. Yet much of interethnic violence during WWII also took place in Bosnia, including deportations and mass executions of Jews, Serbs and Roma by the fascist puppet state of Independent Croatia (of which Bosnia was a

part during the war), and the massacres of Muslim populations in Eastern Bosnia committed by Serb nationalist paramilitaries. Consequently, after WWII, Bosnia became the most important theatre for enactment of Yugoslav policy of socialist multinationalism or “brotherhood and unity,” discussed in the previous chapter. What is therefore important about Deda Mraz in the context of Yugoslavia are neither its origins or meanings, but the effect of bringing together the children from all different national groups, and teaching them shared values and rituals that in turn could help them see each other as a part of the same national community.

It was this aspect of the symbolic ritual that remained pertinent even as the figure of Deda Mraz started to lose its ideological and political purchase through years of repetition of the same rituals. Gradually, as was the case throughout Europe and with many other socialist practices and symbols, Deda Mraz drifted away from original political intention, losing much of its revolutionary significance and becoming a part of the routine of wintertime. It developed into neither a primary ideological symbol of state power, nor an object of real dissent like in other parts of Eastern Europe.<sup>18</sup> This does not, however, mean that Deda Mraz became irrelevant or meaningless. To the contrary, multiple generations of citizens taking part in the state-designed and mandated holiday rituals developed their own attachments to New Year’s rites, which are simply irreducible to any ideological intention that Yugoslav communists might have had when they began envisioning the secular New Year as an alternative to Christmas. The fact that New Year’s Eve remains in Bosnia and throughout former Yugoslavia one of the most popular holidays, still more significant than Christmas in many cases, testifies to the enduring success of Communists in instilling hegemonic values, practices and forms.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, not all of such symbols of the everyday continued to live on so vibrantly in the public lives of post-Yugoslavs and in the emerging national imaginaries. When Yugoslav socialism and the federal state collapsed, many normalized, quotidian socialist traditions, symbols and mythologies became understood in a new light, enduring various kinds of attacks and erasures, but also complex forms of re-signification and re-politicization. Yet histories of everyday life, and banal artifacts such as Deda Mraz, have in many cases preserved much of their affective significance. As Yugoslav one-party system was crumbling down, and the future of the federal union was becoming more and more uncertain, a group of enthusiasts, inspired by writings of Croatian author, Dubravka Ugrešić, began compiling the *Lexicon of Yugoslav Mythologies* eventually a book and then a user generated online site that documents the aspects of the everyday and popular culture, which defined the experiences of the generations born and raised in this state. The entries were submitted by amateur writers from all corners of Yugoslavia and often written in different linguistic variants and scripts. While Deda Mraz is not one of the entries in this book, there are submissions dedicated to the Day of Children’s Joy.

The *Lexicon* and the controversy surrounding Deda Mraz pose as paradigmatic instantiations of the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia, the reawakening of interest and collective longing for objects, popular culture, and forms of sociality which characterized the era of

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<sup>18</sup> Vienna based historian of socialist Czechoslovakia, Muriel Blaive, has brought my attention to the fact Czechs, Slovaks, and even Hungarians and Poles never accepted soviet Ded Moroz as a holiday figure. His Yugoslav popularity, it turns out, is more of an exception than the rule. In most of these formerly socialist and predominantly Catholic countries, the Little Jesus has returned as the main Christmas gift-giver. See, Blaive, Muriel. 1997. « 1956 : Le rendez-vous manqué de l’histoire ou le retour du Père Noël en Tchécoslovaquie ». - Prague : Documents de travail du Cefres, 21 p., notes bibliog. (also personal communication, July 2010).

<sup>19</sup> And ironically enough, New Year’s celebrations have recently become a major occasion for reconnection with former nationals of the joint Yugoslav state: youth from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia has (re)discovered Sarajevo as an appealing destination for New Year’s Eve festivities, while many young Bosnians (especially prior to elimination of visas to Western European countries) have been choosing to visit other ex-Yugoslav countries for the reasons of cost, proximity and shared cultural practice.

Yugoslav socialism. Similar phenomena have been documented and analyzed in other Eastern European contexts (i.e. Berdahl 1999; Boym 2001; Boyer 2006; Velikonja 2009; Gille and Todorova 2010) where the new demands of post-socialist “transition” to market democracy have engendered unique forms of recuperation, revalorization and play with artifacts, practices and values of the socialist era. But as Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004) have argued, post-socialist nostalgia brings together a range of different, and sometimes contradicting processes and projects, which must be studied for the effects they produce in their respective national and political contexts. Nostalgia of this sort is neither a matter of personal memory or longing (although affective attachments of individuals do play a role in it) nor simply another marketing narrative serving insatiable needs of ever expanding global capitalism. It is in fact a sphere of intense re-articulation of political demands on the basis of historical experiences, and emergent anxieties and hopes for the future (Boyer 2006). When political subjects evoke socialist era values and convictions in the contemporary political moment, they do so not (only) to describe a historical moment that seems more hopeful from the one they occupy today, but in order to provide the grounds for intervention whose discursive form can be made intelligible—precisely on the account of its historicity. While Deda Mraz can be seen as an object of nostalgic longing, because he is an artifact of personal memory of an idealized time, the political content and force of his figure cannot be denied. In fact, his political power arises out personal memories, affective ties, and lived experiences that helped shape political subjectivities and sensibilities of several “Yugoslav” generations.

*Mapping normality: ideologies and everyday postsocialist, postwar life*

In postwar Bosnia, memories of socialism are often irreconcilable with experiences of wartime violence and persecution, because the war not only destroyed the comforts of life for which Yugoslavia was famous, but also staged a devastating reversal of the socialist doctrine of “brotherhood and unity.” The previous chapter has helped contextualize this apparent contradiction, by suggesting that ethnic nationalism in Bosnia Herzegovina emerged as a result of organized campaigns, which sought to draw up and render legitimate boundaries between national groups. Nevertheless, the nationalists’ accomplishments in reordering things and people have made it extremely difficult to analyze the processes of remembering Yugoslav socialism by not merely resorting to ethnically colored differences in interpretation of Yugoslav history and legacies. In Bosnia in particular, the memories of Yugoslav period remain profoundly contested, shaped by political interests, regional histories and enduring traumas of ethnic persecution and displacement (e.g. Jansen 2007). Most Bosnians today at once venerate the Yugoslav state for its successful modernization, and lament that the violent end of socialism debunked the entire Yugoslav project as a charade.

What’s more, due to the specificities of Bosnian postwar experience, when such contestations over the meaning of the socialist period emerge in public discourse, they often tackle questions of its legacy indirectly. For one, middle aged Bosnians rarely describe the pre-1992 period of their lives as “socialist.” Instead they filter their biographies through the categories of “the time before the war” [*prije rata*] and the “time after” it [*poslije rata*]. Usually, such qualifiers also map onto the ubiquitous discourses about normalcy—the prewar period is the temporal location not so much of socialism but of normal life, one that was lost in the violence of a devastating war and must somehow be reconstructed in the postwar period.

Such understanding of normality in significant ways set Bosnia apart from other postsocialist contexts where such terms are used to very different ends.

In literature on postsocialist transformations, the adjective normal, and the related category of normality, emerge as polyvalent and at times slippery notions, which frequently describe contradictory ideas and processes. On the one hand, the unraveling of expected patterns of life, previously dominant values and familiar institutions that formed part and parcel of the collapse of state socialism (e.g. Berdahl 2000; Creed 1998; Humphrey 2002; Verdery 2003) makes it possible to locate discourses on normality as simultaneously being everywhere and nowhere. Dramatic and drastic post-1989 transformations have provided anthropologists with an opportunity to investigate what people do and say when their worlds experience such large-scale upheavals. Postsocialism then, by definition, is an “abnormal” state, in so far that it produces forms of life that challenge previously normalized visions of personhood, sociality and value.<sup>20</sup>

However, some clusters of the much-criticized scholarship on postsocialist “transition,” propose the reverse view: that the end of socialism equals the return of normality that had been lost when Eastern European countries became a part of the “Soviet orbit.” Larry Ray has recently noted that in much of sociological literature on the implications of the fall of communism, 1989 is seen as a moment of “normalization” in the dual sense of ‘return’ to an earlier pre-socialist and capitalist trajectory and the abandonment of revolutionary hopes inherent to socialist politics (2009, 321-322). This particular mode of emplotment portrays the fall of socialism as a return to the life that had for many decades somehow been denied to residents of socialist societies. Yet, such assumption rests on a limited understanding of the link between normality and utopia, leaving behind the possibility that everyday life can contain utopian aspects, that utopia itself can be a normative ideal, and that situated forms of normality had indeed been forged and experienced during socialism.

In her writings on the search for normal life through new forms of postsocialist consumption, anthropologist Krisztina Fehérváry reflects on the popularity of discourses that describe the abnormal conditions of state socialism in contemporary Baltic and Central Europe, while shedding light on extraordinary expectations about which goods and spaces should now be deemed normal (Fehérváry 2002, 370). Like Ray, Fehérváry sees such frames as being forged in relation to hopes exploded by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, which many people expected would improve lifestyles and open new possibilities, bringing their experiences in line with imagined standards in the West. But Fehérváry also shows that “the logic by which the postsocialist middle class demands equivalence with the West was fostered during state socialist era, when the aim of achieving and surpassing western standards of living was both a state and a popular objective” (383-4; see also Fehérváry 2009). Specifically, such expectations coalesced through intense modernization campaigns in early periods of socialism, only to subsequently be betrayed during periods of scarcity and deprivation that helped cement the view that everyday life during socialism was anything but normal. Crucially, the use of the ubiquitous accusatory phrase “this is not normal,” Fehérváry reports, continued well after 1989, except that it was now signifying “the disappointments in the regime change for not ushering in an expected normalcy” (374). These disappointments frequently link up with the new patterns of social stratification that mark some Hungarians as winners and some as losers of the “transition.” To make irony

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<sup>20</sup>I do not intend to argue here that the fall of socialism produced some form of social anomie as defined by Durkheim, but merely to make the obvious point that the large scale economic, political and social transformations entailed in the “transition” helped shift and transform various kinds of social norms. But as I argue in this chapter, socialist era norms did not simply disappear, but continue to remerge at crucial moment and contexts, as an answer to new challenges.

worse, much like during socialism, the failure of postsocialist state to ensure expected standards of normalcy, rendered private family life and its spaces into sites where a certain semblance of normal life had to be created (384).

In postwar Bosnia, such accusatory phrases about the abnormal nature of social life commonly reoccur in all spheres of everyday life and political discourse. Yet these accusations take place alongside an implicit argument that the postsocialist—or better yet, postwar—period fails to meet expectations devised not on account of failures of socialism, but its successes. Socialist Yugoslavia, much like socialist Hungary about which Fehérváry writes, invested a great deal of its resources and political energy into economic modernization and the development of a national consumer culture, both of which would become central to developing criteria for judging what constitutes normal life. The peculiar positioning of Yugoslavia in the Cold War material and ideational geographies—its autonomy from Soviet influences and closer connection to the West—helped create conditions for steady rise and improvement of standard of life (while also making it more vulnerable to fluctuations in global economy, see Woodward 1995). In his chronicle of Yugoslav consumer society, Croatian historian Igor Duda has shown that while the greatest rates of economic growth were recorded in the 1960s, the time of greatest consumer prosperity in Yugoslavia had been achieved in late 1970s and early 1980s (Duda 2010, 23). Recent historical ethnographies of regional scholars, also suggest that late socialism in Yugoslavia is now remembered and narrated as a time of enjoyment and relative prosperity (see edited volume by Luthar and Pušnik 2010). Ironically, as I discuss in the first chapter, much of Yugoslav sociological literature and Western political science published during this period describes it as a time of great political and economic insecurity; the prewar period brings economic reform, shortages, hyperinflation, rise of nationalism, debates about Yugoslavia's debts and so on (e.g. Ramet 1985).

An additional complication arises out of the fact that the end of this cushy, comfortable, soft-style socialism was by far the most violent, destructive and tragic in all of Eastern Europe. Within the narrower context of former Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as its central and most ethnically diverse republic, certainly bore the largest brunt of this devastation. From the vantage point of an average Bosnian, normality disappeared with the start of war, whose arrival is sometimes difficult to truly separate from the fall of socialism and the dissolution of the federal state. The processes of political liberalization and dissolution of Yugoslavia came hand in hand with intimate losses, tragic displacements and traumas experienced by the local populations. In her ethnography of wartime Sarajevo, Ivana Maček chronicles a completely different genre of discourses on normalness, as her informants struggle to produce an “imitation of life” and maintain everyday routines while enduring highly abnormal, humiliating and anxiety provoking situations engendered by the siege (2009, 62). Such struggles augmented the shock produced by the complete reversal of their personal predicaments for which they were absolutely unprepared. By 2008, thirteen years after the end of the war, the memories of these unexpected and deeply traumatic shifts in personal biographies still loom large. The fact most people were simply unable to reconstruct their previous standard of life and sense of security in the postwar era, only magnified the sense of lost normality.

Hence, in Bosnia the magnitude of wartime violence and the political hopelessness that emerged out of disappointments with postwar reconstruction have helped remap the last twenty years as a period of continuous destruction of normal life, rather than its restoration. This situation has in turn helped significantly reduce certain forms of anticommunist rhetoric, which drove postsocialist “transition”, lustration and “settling accounts” in Central Europe. As Gilbert

(2006) reports, in the eyes of most Bosnians, whatever Communists might have done wrong pales in comparison to the havoc created by the nationalists. These standpoints should not be discounted or reduced to romanticizing tendencies common among victims of war, but seen as critical reflections on the disjuncture between lived experiences straddling the prewar/postwar divide. Rather than embellishing, these narratives provide decidedly disenchanting insights, and point to the gaping distance between ideological narratives and lived experience.

Such modes of reflection, and distinction between representations and experience, also constituted what was expected as normal behavior. Normal people possessed the ability to objectify ideology as something at once determinant of and external to lived relations; in that sense, they could appreciate Deda Mraz and socialist New Year, without worrying too much about the kinds of political programs such practices and symbols necessarily enacted. Moreover, they could also praise and long for aspects of everyday life and pleasure from socialism, without necessarily identifying themselves with the ideological discourses of the Communist party. Crucially, because they understood ideological hegemonies as at once immutable and external to their lives (Yurchak 2005), they did not feel hypocritical in practicing certain forms of consent to them.<sup>21</sup> This form of political subjectivity does not seem specific to Bosnia. Drawing on reflections of Eastern German journalists in the aftermath of the Wende, Dominic Boyer argues that conceptions of selfhood among his interlocutors relied on the idea that the self is something that emerges dialectically “in the ratio of inner and outer forces, in the striving to create from within to without balanced against the certainty of the power of the *System* to form from without to within” (2005, 219, emphasis mine). This consciousness of the *System*’s constitutive influence in turn made East Germans more aware than their Western counterparts of the equally systemic, limiting but also enabling function of the new capitalist *System*. The tacit and ambivalent acceptance of the *System*’s role in individuals’ lives, albeit in a different theoretical idiom, is also present in Yurchak’s discussion on “normal people.” In contrast to activists and dissidents, who took the authoritative discourse of the Party literally (and sought to consequently propose different solutions to the gap between theory and practice), normal people tried to live their lives through and around these contradictions, in a way that avoided direct struggle with the greater powers.

The importance of this ability to reflect on dominant ideological discourses, all the while being acutely aware of the ways existent political hegemonies shape one’s life and one’s sense of self, does not go away with the fall of socialism. While acknowledging that contemporary Bosnia is deeply politically divided, many of my informants spoke in a very similar way of the necessity of maintaining critical distance from nationalist ideologies and of recognizing their historically contingent reality. Normal people, in this instance, are not “burdened” by politics and nationalist essentialisms and are able to “judge” others according to different, more relevant and more enduring sets of criteria. Kolind Tolston (2007) reports that Muslims in Stolac, in seeking to provide an alternative space of sociality and ethical engagement, invoke the category of

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<sup>21</sup> Alexei Yurchak (2005) has argued that particularly during late socialism, amidst the increasing formalization and circular self-referentiality of Party’s ideological discourses, socialist rituals and symbols started to serve a different kind of purpose, not representing lived experience per se, but helping uphold existing state of affairs. Ironically, this hypernormalization of ideological discourse and practice also opened up alternative spaces of *lived* normality that were enabled by the socialist state but never fully under its control. In other words, even though most people who participated in the state sponsored events and practices continued to through their actions reproduce socialist institutions, these rites and associated paroles were no longer taken at a literal level, or thought to describe existent relations. While dissidents and ardent communist activist did see a problem in this gap between “theory and practice,” ordinary citizens did not necessarily protest outwardly, but accepted the Party’s “authoritative discourse”, as immutable and unquestionable even at times when it most definitely failed to persuade. Similar dynamics took place in late socialist Yugoslavia.

“decent” people [*pošteni ljudi*], as an alternative to national divisions. While disempowered and left on the outskirts of decision-making processes, these “normal, decent people” nevertheless are idealized as having the ability critically reflect upon ideological narratives of nationalists. At times, this critical capacity is paired with the commitment to remaining unchanged as a person [*stabilna ličnost*] even when the entire context has experienced a profound transformation. To be a turncoat, to change sides, parties, worldviews, religious attitudes, by contrast is read as sinister, disingenuous, and as evidence of an ethically corrupted subjectivity of the sort that thrives in these abnormal times [*nenormalna vremena*]. Such idealized forms of ethical personhood and historical consciousness were central to the discourses of postwar antinationalist Left in Bosnia, which prides itself as having maintained a sense of integrity and externality to the Dayton imposed regimes of truth and value, which reified and only made stronger nationalist worldviews. The ideological critique mounted by the antinationalist (though in some senses misleading and occasionally even self-aggrandizing) proved crucial to the position out of which postwar oppositional politics could be constituted.

*“Polidick”: Socialist Santa comes under the attack of the nationalists*

To the majority my own informants, the loss of normality, and the subsequent shift in social norms that followed it, ensued not only out of the chaos of war, but out of designed nationalist projects. The story of onslaught on socialist-Santa begins not in 2008, but with the very advent of nationalist elites into power in the early 1990s. According to the customary critiques, nationalists have from the beginning been acutely aware that some socialist values and lived memories could pose a threat to their emergent political hegemony. Since the early nineties, historical revisionists targeted Deda Mraz in organized campaigns to replace icons of the former era with new nationalist symbols. In 1992, Croatian press working under the auspices of the nationalist elites suggested replacing the socialist symbol of Deda Mraz, with a Deda Božičnjak (trans. Grandpa Christmas), who would bring Croatian children gifts for Christmas, now deemed the real winter holiday of the Croat patriots (Rihtman-Auguštin 2000). But the Catholic Church in Croatia cared little for this initiative, calling Deda Božičnjak “as godless as Deda Mraz,” preferring instead the return of a more traditional, religious figure, that of Little Jesus. A couple of years later, during the 1996/1997 winter holidays, the leader of Bosnian Muslims, Alija Izetbegović, suggested there was no longer any place in “democratic” Bosnia for one such “communist fabrication.”<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after their publication, these words inspired the provocative but short-lived satirical paper *Polikita*<sup>23</sup> to feature as the cover of their January 15, 1997 issue, a photomontage based on a famous portrait of Marshal Tito by Božidar Jakac. Here, the deceased Yugoslav president was dressed as a Deda Mraz, spotting a red and white coat and a hat with a red star. In the bottom stood a proclamation: “After historian Tuđman, historian Izetbegović proves Deda Mraz was a communist.”<sup>24</sup> The authors of the parole used the appropriate national/ist terms for

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<sup>22</sup> See “The Holiday, All Wrapped Up; Bosnian Muslims Take Sides Over Santa,” *Washington Post*, 12/26/96

<sup>23</sup> *Polikita* is a pun combining the local word for politics—*politika*—with a slang word for penis—*kita*. In my interpretation, the name also references the right leaning, nationalist daily “*Politika*” from Serbia.

<sup>24</sup> As a local publication, embedded within a field of discourse, *Polikita* could play with this similarity between Croat and Bosniak nationalists without resorting to interpretations common in Western media which saw Izetbegović’s words as a sign of growing Islamization of Bosnian society. While such attacks on Deda Mraz certainly had a lot to do with the processes of desecularization of both Croats and Muslims in former Yugoslavia (a process favored by nationalists as a way of consolidating



“historian”: the Croatian language word *povjesničar* and a Bosnian word *historičar* for Izetbegović. In this way, they simultaneously emphasized that despite the apparent difference in form, the content of these nationalist attacks on Deda Mraz was essentially analogous. The direct referencing of the figure of historian served not only to trouble the authority of these political figures as interpreters of the past, but to also remind the readers of the tendency of any new elite to fudge and reinterpret historical facts for its own purposes. These processes of rewriting history during the 1980s and 1990s provided significant political force to nationalist elites scrambling to take power in the course of Yugoslav dissolution. Concurrently, much of the postwar ideological and symbolic remapping of the public space by nationalist rested on the systematic undermining of alternative histories that coded Yugoslav socialist experiences in a more positive light.

In the January edition, *Polikita* offered a range of sharp satirical commentary aiming to expose this logic of the attack on Deda Mraz, including a cartoon of Izetbegović himself dressed in a red coat and white beard, holding hands with Mickey Mouse, an “announcement” of Izetbegović’s imminent study of and recommendations on the future of Snowman and a photo-montage of president Tuđman as a raunchy, half naked Deda Mraz in hot pants. The key article in the issue played on the physical resemblance between Karl Marx and Deda Mraz, offering an absurd fictional speech by Izetbegović, the “historian,” which ultimately argues that Deda Mraz was a communist. A couple of pages down, *Polikita* published a list of reasons why Deda Mraz should not be eminent to us, attempting to mimic but also render absurd the rationales of nationalists. The reasons included the fact that “Deda Mraz gives gifts to strangers and not only to family members, friends, former jail buddies and party cronies” and “fulfills wishes, all the while [nationalists] cannot fulfill even their own promises” (11).

Then, in June 1997, the new edition of *Polikita* offered as its cover the caricature in which an image of President Izetbegović, through a series of repetitions, becomes a corresponding image of Marshal Tito, suggesting a clearly unflattering ideological correspondence between the leader of independent Bosnia, a former political prisoner, nationalist and anticommunist, and Yugoslav “totalitarian” president, Josip Broz. The image irked the Bosniak nationalist elites, undoubtedly in part because of their history of conflict with the League of Communists, which peaked during the so called “Sarajevo process” in 1983, caused in part by Izetbegović’s authorship of the “Islamic Proclamation,” a political manifesto which argues religious principles must be made the basis of political development of Bosnian Muslims. Izetbegović was sentenced to 13 years in prison because of this document, making him anything but a communist sympathizer.<sup>25</sup> But beyond the obvious interpretation, like many such images, this one can also be read in multiple ways. In the best-case scenario, this photomontage sets up a similarity between the two politicians on the basis of their presumed talents as statesmen (an unlikely interpretation given Izetbegović’s limited nation building successes, made all the more painful by comparison with Tito, the great statesman and Non-Aligned leader). But equally as problematic, and potentially profoundly delegitimizing, was the allegation embedded in the photomontage: that Izetbegović himself was a dictator, manipulator of history and an enemy of the freedom of expression.

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national identities), they were aiming to discount alternative political enterprises, including socialist and social democratic parties that were drawing on the memory and legacies of socialism.

<sup>25</sup> Contrary to some rumors, Izetbegović did not in this book argue for the creation of an Islamic state out of multinational Bosnia. In fact, he explicitly argued that such an arrangement would be impossible. Instead, he argued that Islamic principles ought to form the basis of Bosniak politics, which had to see itself as a part of a larger, pan Islamic movement. For a discussion of the manifesto, see Malcolm, 1996.



Figure 20: Left, January 1997 *Polikita* Cover featuring Tito as Deda Mraz (Photos courtesy of Samir Šestan)

Figure 21: Right, June 1997 cover and photomontage of Izetbegović “becoming” Tito (Photos courtesy of Samir Šestan)

Herein lies *Polikita*'s genius: even in the early years of Bosnian postwar reconstruction, through its playful critiques of post-war nationalists, more than any other Bosnian paper, *Polikita* deployed images, symbols and discourses from the socialist period, emphasizing continuity of ideological manipulation rather than its rupture. The radical aspect of its politics and public presence lies not so much with the vulgarity of its discourse or the constant use of sexual innuendo, but unapologetic awareness that the promises of post-war democratic transition will be betrayed because the narratives and devices of a “domesticated” nationalism were in some ways just as problematic, if not more, as those of socialism. In fact, *Polikita*'s interventions seem to suggest that the nationalists managed to harness the worst and most destructive aspects of Yugoslav socialism—in particular, its intolerance towards ideological heterogeneity. Soon after publishing this cover, *Polikita* earned the dubious honor of becoming the only paper banned in the post-communist period when it was brought to court under the charges for distributing obscene materials, which were “insulting and belittling the patriotic, religious and moral sentiments of the public” (Naša Borba 1997). Hence, the mode of its ideological critique foreshadowed *Polikita*'s own destiny—and ultimate censoring.

Unlike *Polikita*, Deda Mraz survived the entrapments of Bosnia's early post-war years, continuing to visit children in the workplaces of parents' newly privatized firms, in public

kindergartens and old socialist Houses of Culture and local government headquarters [*mjesne zajednice*]. But five years after Izetbegović's death, Deda Mraz seemed to have acquired a new nemesis in the person of Arzija Mahmutović, the director of Sarajevo kindergartens whose words and actions began the controversy. Mahmutović justified her decision by arguing that a number of Muslim parents who held strong religious beliefs did not want Deda Mraz because "he did not exist in the culture and tradition of Bosniak people."<sup>26</sup> She made this claim despite the obvious fact that most Bosnians, including those of Muslim origin, had for more than sixty years taken part in such customary holiday rituals. To expose her formulation as ideological and untrue, some of her public interlocutors even demanded to know whether Mahmutović herself had a childhood photograph with Deda Mraz! Her affirmative response to this question further fueled the arguments that the decision to ban these festivities had sinister political purposes.

Amidst this new debate, and in the sea of other similar responses, a cluster of Djed Mraz sympathizers founded a Facebook group, accusing Mahmutović and her backers of abolishing a ritual of inclusion with the intent to create "little Adolfs"—suggesting the exile of this magical gift-giver was in itself a form of fascism. Such formulations were favored among supporters and members of the antinationalist opposition, which often undervalued the innovative political nature of nationalist hegemony by dismissing it as merely a continuation or return of fascist ideologies, identities and iconography from WWII. To a certain extent, this move made sense, since during the war in the 1990s, many of the nationalist politicians and the paramilitaries mobilized symbols used by their historic "corollaries"—the fascist collaborators such as Ustašas and Četniks. Socialist Yugoslavia, on the other hand, defined itself as an explicitly antifascist state, said to be born out of struggles of local populations to defeat both fascists from within and without—foreign occupiers as well as their collaborators (who were often, rightfully or not, equated with nationalists). By indexing a fascist figure—Adolf Hitler—these critics were also tapping into this long and powerful history of Yugoslav socialist narratives about antifascism, thought to be endangered by forceful replacement of socialist era symbols of inclusion with troubling new nationalist policies. Yet, they were also suggesting that rather than being a product of differing but equally legitimate political opinion, campaigns against Deda Mraz illustrated the moral corruption of nationalism, the insincerity and unscrupulous nature of the postwar political elites, and the absurdity of Bosnia's postwar reality in which fascist ideologies and nationalist segregation had become normal and acceptable. This oversimplified view of nationalist political projects discounted the ways in which the politics, the tones and attitudes of nationalist parties had changed over the last twenty years. It also served to polarize the Bosnian public—in this case, very much the "Bosniak" public in the Muslim-Croat Federation—into two camps, one which was allegedly normal and anti-nationalist, and the other, which not only nationalist, but deeply irrational, pathological and dangerous.

Yet this simplification hid away a more frightening uncertainty: given the last 20 years of Bosnian history, whose position could be read as normal and/or normative? In the following two sections, I show first how an artistic intervention in defense of Deda Mraz, designed by a Sarajevan artist Zox (Zoran Herceg), helped reveal the profound transformations of the discursive space in which arguments once easily recognizable as absurd and fake, could be misinterpreted as genuine. My attention then shifts to the ways in which these radical changes continue to affect the group of people in charge of both social reproduction and of securing the moral vitality of the state: that of parents. By focusing on the struggles of an informal parents'

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<sup>26</sup> She later qualified this formulation by saying one family in particular complained. See <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/Article/1365439.html>

organization, seeking to return both Deda Mraz and the rule of law into Sarajevo kindergartens, I chronicle the complex predicaments of raising children amidst the profound upheavals of nationalist politics and postwar reconstruction, through the eyes of a generation of parents who grew up in two worlds—one socialist and the other one, still in emergence. I end with an argument that unravels the political sedimentations intersecting in the figure of Deda Mraz, contending in the final draw that Deda Mraz renders visible not only the specters of past, but also and more urgently the profound anxieties about the national future.

*Vučko, between normal and absurd: On the misguided effort to save the Olympic mascot*

In December 2008, as the Deda Mraz Affair began to unravel, Sarajevo based artist, Zoran Herceg-Zox, staged an artistic provocation on the discussion forum of the news portal Sarajevo-x.com which was concurrently featuring a series of articles about the same controversy along with an avalanche of reader comments. Shortly after, Zox began promoting his project on Facebook, creating a group page on the social networking site, which was gaining fast popularity throughout the country and was increasingly being used by aspiring and seasoned activists. He named his campaign “Ukinimo Vučka”—or “Let’s get rid of Vučko,” seeking to creatively engage the public around the Deda Mraz controversy by using a different, but equally beloved character: the wolf-mascot of the 1984 Olympic Games in Sarajevo. Vučko, the friendly little wolf, is one of the most recognizable symbols of the city of Sarajevo and its single most important moment of international success and glory. After Yugoslavia won the bid to host the 1984 Olympics, the organizing committee for the games put together a nation wide contest for the Games’ mascot. A jury of composed out of high-ranking communist officials, academics and artists chose six finalists among 870 entries submitted. The entries were then featured in several national newspapers and submitted to a public vote. Vučko, the little wolf, designed by Slovenian designer and illustrator Jože Trobec won by a landslide, capturing 70 % of the public vote, and easily eliminating his competition which included a chipmunk, a lamb, a mountain goat, a porcupine, and a snowball.<sup>27</sup>

The 1984 Olympics brought the attention, experts and funds from all over Yugoslavia into the relatively small and provincial capital of an otherwise “underdeveloped” Yugoslav republic. The decision to choose Sarajevo as a candidate city (instead of other locations, in Slovenia for example, which at the time had better infrastructure) emerged out of the Party’s commitment to greater decentralization and to balance of economic investments in different parts of the country. As a destination, Sarajevo also provided a unique cultural and architectural window into the region’s history, which could be easily be marketed to Western audiences and prospective tourists. The fact these 1984 Games were the first Winter Olympics held in a socialist country, created an enormous political pressure to make them into a success. And for a city known as the place where the Great War started with the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in 1914, the Winter Olympics also afforded an opportunity for forging a less burdensome historical legacy. The preparations lasted for years, transforming the city’s geography, giving rise to completely new housing complexes, and new sports and recreational infrastructure on the neighboring mountains.

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<sup>27</sup> "Those Loony Olympic Mascots: Vučko, Sarajevo 1984." 2010. *Time*. May 21. Accessed December 13, 2012. <http://olympics.time.com/2010/05/21/those-loony-olympic-mascots/slide/vucko-sarajevo-1984/>

The 1984 Sarajevo Games were a domestic and international success. My informants in Sarajevo, during occasional moments of local patriotism and pride, often spoke about the fact that during the closing ceremony, Juan Samarand, thanked the organizers for their hospitality and proclaimed Sarajevo Olympics one of the most organized and welcoming competition in its modern history. The success of the Olympics boosted the confidence of Sarajevans, many of who had participated in the preparation and welcoming efforts, paid special taxes to help finance the building of infrastructure, and at the final hour, came out the clean the snow off the streets. Sarajevan garage punk band, *Zabranjeno Pušenje* (Smoking Prohibited),<sup>28</sup> memorialized these efforts through the lyrics of its song dedicated to *Abid*, a construction worker enlisted in efforts to build a gas pipeline in the city. Although the song is an apparent critique of the state's planned economic activities and investments, and particularly the taxation instituted in order to finance them, it also makes a loving reference to the 1980s bloom of the city: "Sarajevo, our dearest city, we have fixed you up for the Olympics." As a result of the Games and the attention the city received during this time, Sarajevo began to emerge out of the shadows of more populous Belgrade and Zagreb, developing its own urban identity and culture.



**Figure 22:** A photograph of a protest sign asking “Who killed Vučko?” with the little wolf hanged. From the exhibit dedicated to the 2008 protests, Sarajevo Spring 2009

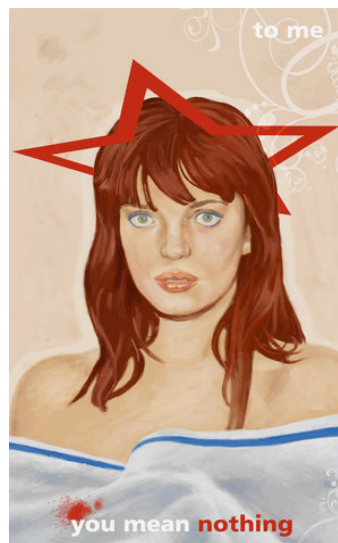
Over the years, *Vučko* showed up again in cartoons, collectables and at times even political campaigns. In 2008, during the spring demonstrations which I analyze in the following chapter, *Vučko* re-appeared on a startling political poster: the little wolf was portrayed as hanged on the rope, alongside the question: “Who Killed *Vučko*?” On this poster, *Vučko* seemed to

<sup>28</sup> *Zabranjeno Pušenje* was one of the bands associated with the New Primitiv cultural movement. The band became extremely popular not only in its hometown, Sarajevo, but across Yugoslavia. It’s narrative lyrics, use of slang and local references, which were sometimes only partly comprehensible to listeners in Serbia or Croatia, nevertheless gave the band a unique character. Through tragic and comic stories of petty criminals, cab drivers, battered wives, and horny teenagers, the band’s songs managed to map the aesthetic, sensorial and experiential space inhabited by several generations of Sarajevans. To make matters worse, the band split into two bands in the course of the war, when its two most prominent members decided to take different sides. Today, there is the Sarajevo based *Zabranjeno Pušenje*, which continues to develop albums full of nostalgia, and the No Smoking Band, which is unapologetically politically incorrect and vehemently anti-nostalgic. Neither one of the bands is a faithful continuation of the original.



embody much more than the Olympic Games; it referenced the perceived spirit of the city, characterized not only by diversity, tolerance and openness to difference, but also by hard work, perseverance and capacity to undertake and successfully complete large projects. The image diagnosed the lack of such spirit, élan and resourcefulness in the postwar period, calling out to and condemning Bosnia's new nationalist leadership. During these protests, which were targeting specific institutions, agencies and officials in the local government who were deemed indirectly responsible for the death of 16 year old boy, the poster offered a morbid analogy between the victim and hanged boy-wolf, Vučko.

When Zox decided to displace and problematize the discussions around Deda Mraz by using Vučko, he was knowingly tapping in this local history and the enormous popularity of Vučko as a symbol of past glory and of the spirit of the city. Similarly to Deda Mraz, Vučko is much more than a friendly little wolf, suitable for teaching children moral lessons or making cute souvenirs. The apparent friendliness of both of these characters, their association with childhood and innocence was not accidental. Even though Vučko could hardly be criticized for the same reasons because of which Deda Mraz became a problem to Bosniak nationalists, Zox nevertheless thought that the seemingly childish, positive and playful nature of both figures could serve his exercise perfectly. "One could imagine," he told me, "that the people who wanted to erase fifty years of our [socialist] history, and burn all those bridges, could also be ready to give up Vučko too." Zox's idea was to ultimately show the absurdity of Deda Mraz's exile from the city's kindergartens by producing a similarly "ridiculous" set of arguments around Vučko, whose task was to mimic and in a way over-identify with nationalist discourses.



**Figure 23:** The poster that began it all--"Let's Ban Vučko Because!" (Courtesy of Zoran Herceg)

**Figure 24:** Another artwork "Countries not Existing Anymore,"<sup>29</sup> deals with the personal dimension of experience of dissolution of Yugoslavia. (Courtesy of Zoran Herceg)

<sup>29</sup> This image is also playing up the sense of ambivalence over the loss of the socialist life-word. The parole embedded in the work itself "to me you mean nothing" seems to contradict the very choice of the theme. In denying one's attachment, one exposes the magnitude of its effect. The woman portrayed in the image wears a wreath in the shape of the Red Star, which causes her to bleed on the white sheet that adorns her. A secular body of a woman, who seems to stand for the nation itself, replaces the religious figure of the Christ, indexing a sense of sacrifice, victimhood and the very viscerality of experience of Yugoslav disembodiment.

The campaign began with an initial poster, featuring a red and white image of Vučko, encircled in a green sign circle crossed with a diagonal line, suggesting that the red socialist past was being blocked and supplanted by a new nationalistic and possibly religious order, symbolized by traditionally Muslim (read: Bosniak) color, green. Yet, as the rest of the poster suggested, the antagonism against Vučko would not only be assigned to Bosniak nationalists, but could easily be shared by all other nationalist camps. Underneath of this image stood a list of “reasons” for banning Vučko: i) Because he is not a part of our culture and our tradition; ii) Because he was designed by a Slovene; iii) Because he is a Vuk (Wolf) just like Vuk Karadžić<sup>30</sup>; iv) Because he is showing two fingers (not now)<sup>31</sup>; v) Because he is red (sometimes); v) Because his time has passed; vi) Because, before me, there was but deluge! The messages were heteroglossic, bringing together a range of voices that seemed to contradict each other, while the targets of complaints seemed to endlessly slip away. Yet the last two justifications on the list indicated a shift, which announced quite directly the political stakes of the message. What was being erased and denied in the cacophony of nationalist voices was the significance of the historical phase that predated the rise of exclusivist nationalist projects. Although the poster played with the idea that the time and the political moment within which this character was embedded had past, the campaign itself asserted itself as the proof of the contrary.

During our conversation, Zoran would often bring up the import of this socialist and prewar experience in the lives of his own generation, and speculate on how this memory may impact the future of the country as a whole. Zoran himself came from an ethnically mixed family, carrying a name that in the increasingly Bosniak dominated Sarajevo “outed” him as the (national) other. His personal and family history abounded with moments in which this “otherness”—certainly ethnic but more importantly ideological and political—defined his experiences and relations. He’d get into arguments with his Serb cousins over the contemporary relevance of Serbian national mythologies and folklore; he much preferred to identify with antinationalist, urban culture which included comic books and punk musicians. For Zoran, such elements of Yugoslav popular culture formed crucial aspects not only of his identity and politics, but also of his bodily knowledge and sense of being in the world. A sense of embeddedness in and connection to the world of his childhood and early youth could not be reduced to memory, but could be located, as he said “in the way [he] draws...and in that feeling one senses among all those in attendance during a concert of Rambo Amadeus.”<sup>32</sup> Zoran’s emphasis on bodily memory, and embodied compartments, rather than moral or ideological narratives suggested an alternative conceptualization of the impact of lived experience on the process of subject formation. While comic strips and popular music can have quite literal political content and resonances, Zoran located in these forms of affective and embodied experience a set of political sensibilities that could not be reduced either to a made political project or to ideology in a standard sense.

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<sup>30</sup> Vuk Karadžić was the great Montenegrin-Serbian linguist, philologist, folklorist and cultural reformist who became a major force behind the standardization of Serbian language and orthography. Although a main character of the Serbian Revolution, his support of the Illyrian Pan-Yugoslav cultural movement and his work on the Stokavian dialect became instrumental in standardization of Serbo-Croatian, later the official language of socialist Yugoslavia. Yet in the context of new linguistic nationalisms ignited during and after the break-up of Yugoslavia, in popular discourses Vuk Karadžić has also become a victim of revisionism, and is now unjustly seen as a figure of Serb nationalism.

<sup>31</sup> Raising three fingers (thumb, index and the middle finger) is a Serb nationalist signal.

<sup>32</sup> Rambo Amadeus is an iconic Serbian musician, whose playful use of nationalist ideology and folk rationalities made him a favorite among many young, Yugoslav urban dwellers.

Yet these forms of affect did propel Zoran into various forms of political activism during 2008 and 2009, some of which had serious consequences. In the course of political protests in Sarajevo during winter and spring 2008, Zoran emerged as one of the creative minds [*kreativci*] behind the amorphous mass of protestors which carried the months' long demonstrations forward. He created many signs and transparencies and engaged in other tasks where his expertise as a graphic designer could be used. Sometime in March 2008, he made a mistake of letting himself be interviewed for TV news as one of the protestors—which shortly after resulted in him losing a job in the City Tourist Bureau, an agency managed by the cantonal government against which the protestors were marching. Through this punitive measure, Zoran became one of several participants and organizers of the protests who paid a high price for political idealism. But then, in a remarkable act of solidarity, another protestor who happened to be a director of a major marketing firm in Sarajevo, offered Zoran a job, after meeting and witnessing the young artists' talents. In the summer 2009, Zoran joked he was one of the rare Sarajevans who shamelessly benefited from the protests: because of his participation, he met people who found him a better job and a better apartment. Even after the protests had ceased, Zoran continued to work on the fringes of the new organization "Citizen Action", founded in the aftermath of these mobilizations. Among other things, he created the graphic identity and the logo of this organization, and worked to help develop their monthly newsletter "Citizen" [*Gradanin*]. Yet, despite his personal friendships, attachments and shared affinities with the activists of this formal organization, he never became its-card carrying member. Along with several other prominent organizers of the protests, Zoran had little faith in the future of their political interventions generated within the context of a formal, formally registered and increasingly bureaucratic citizen association. His preferred method of work rested on commitment to informality and creative engagement with the world.

So when Zoran came up with the "Let's ban Vučko" campaign in December 2008, he was acting as an individual, as an ardent and long-term participant in the online forum discussions on Sarajevo-x,<sup>33</sup> and as an artist. Many of his standard interlocutors in Sarajevo and on forums recognized right away the pungent irony of his initiative, and continued to deepen and make it even funnier. Some wanted to take Zoran's critique even further, by mimicking the frequent demands of nationalists to have "three of everything" in postwar Bosnia, so that the needs and wants of the constitutive nations, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats could be met equally. Someone suggested that instead of one Vučko, it would be more suitable to have three, a Muslim, Croat and Serb. Soon, debaters started suggesting appropriate ethnic names : Vučko, Vehbija and Vicko. Shortly after, one of the discussion participants remembered the problem of "Others", citizens not belonging to any of the constitutive nations, and suggested that they too should have their own Vučko. He suggested his name should be Finci, referencing the president of Sarajevan Jewish Community, Jacob Finci, who had sadly become an all-purpose public representative for national, ethnic and religious minorities in Bosnia. Yet he followed up that suggestion with another qualification: that Finci could not be in charge, because he belonged to category of "Others" [Ostali], which according to the discriminatory Dayton constitution, made him unable to be president. Another person started complaining that since wolves primarily eat sheep (at least in Bosnian fairytales) the little wolf necessarily had to be a Bosniak, and that no

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<sup>33</sup> SARAJEVO-X discussion forums are immensely popular not only in the capital but throughout Bosnia. People use them for all sorts of purposes, including sharing recipes, getting advice on how to buy a car, and for political discussion. But more importantly, the SAX forums helped make possible the 2008 protests—it was in the course of users' discussions that the decision to protest over the death of young Mrnjavac was made. The forum was then used throughout the political mobilizations as a tool for informing the public on the next steps, for sharing photographs of the protests, and ideas on where to go next.



amount of fidgeting with the names would eliminate that bias. Others complained Vučko was a homosexual, or that he was a pagan idol. The jokes went on for weeks; in the course of these playful exchanges, forum users began to create their own images of Vučko in different nationalist variants, wearing Serb and Muslim nationalist insignia.



**Figure 25:** Nationalist versions of Vučko,<sup>34</sup> derivative of Zox’s spoof (Courtesy of the users of the forum Sarajevo-X.com)

But not everyone that saw this campaign reacted in the same way, or welcomed Zox’s form of political criticism. In designing his intervention amidst the Deda Mraz controversy, Zoran, as most other progressive activists in Sarajevo, expected to be branded as a supporter or a paid agent of the Social Democrats. He anticipated that all criticism engendered by the campaign would be framed in such terms—who was he representing and why was he defending Deda Mraz?! It never really occurred to him that his critics would misinterpret something much more fundamental: the very message of the campaign. Shortly after the poster went viral, Zoran began receiving messages and phone calls from friends and from people who he did not know, all of who were angry about his “shameless attack” on Vučko. One interlocutor exclaimed: “We should ban all of you! And everyone else who does not like Vučko! He is a symbol of one good thing that happened in this city. And you want to ban him?! Way to go! Instead of being proud of having the opportunity to host the Olympics, you are promoting such a banal thing! Why did someone not think of banning Republika Srpska or Milorad Dodik, ha?”

It is possible Zoran’s non-Bosniak name made this particular critic think the initiative was coming from Republika Srpska, and was in some way motivated by nationalism. As the extent of the campaign’s misfiring was revealed, and as more and more people began to vehemently criticize the presumably serious initiative to ban Vučko, Zoran himself remarked that he could not wait to be accused of being a Bosniak nationalist! Yet not all of the critics assumed that this was a nationalist agenda: some actually thought the initiative as malicious and saw its creator as a degenerate, a primitive and a jealous outsider. Instead of joining his parodic campaign to “prove a point” about Djed Mraz, they attacked him for apparently trying to devour

<sup>34</sup> The figure to the left is wearing traditional Turkish attire and an Islamic flag with a crescent and a star. To the rights is an analogous nationalist version of Vučko, spotting a mix of Četnik (Serb nationalist) and Ustaša (Croat nationalist) insignia, such as the checkerboard. For some reason or other, this Vučko is also carrying a flag of Saudi Arabia!

an important, positive symbol. Other discussants on the forum that successfully read the irony of the initiative, tried to discipline through shame and humiliation those who did not seem to get the joke. Even the moderator suggested that the more naïve discussion participants should reevaluate their opinions before sharing them and embarrassing themselves. Yet these modes of collective critique often did not do much to help. One person in particular insisted that she understood the irony, but that since “in all ironic play, there is a bit of truth” she did not support this kind of criticism, presumably because it made certain dangerous arguments possible to articulate and proliferate. Although the forum discussion was dominated by those who read successfully the real intent of the campaign, to this day, the poll on the pages of this forum discussion, which asks: should we ban Vučko, shows more people “against” the ban of Vučko than those “for” it<sup>35</sup>.

When Zoran himself decided to take part in the discussions on the forum and on Facebook, he concluded that the failure of a portion of his audience to recognize the campaign as an ironic device, testified not so much to the fact some people were better versed in the genre or more clever than others, but that the form of argument he made in mimicking nationalist ideology has become so widespread, that some people have grown to anticipate it. The political climate and discursive environment of postwar Bosnia, where “absurd” political arguments now routinely emerge as legitimate in the political mainstream, Zoran suggested, had helped normalize and render indistinguishable locutions that could have once only been uttered humorously or ironically. Zoran’s analysis echoed concerns shared by many Bosnians in the postwar period that their country had lost its grip on reality.

That the call to ban Vučko—this universally bellowed symbol of the city that had no real ideological enemies—was misrecognized by some as serious initiative troubled Zoran even more than the anti-Deda Mraz campaign, which initially inspired him. Months later, while we drank beer in Café Tito, Zoran wondered out loud how so many among his own generation, whose sensibilities were so powerfully molded by similarly ironic interventions of the *Top List of the Surrealists* a group of provocateurs, musicians and artists, who had an immensely popular TV show during the 1980s,<sup>36</sup> could have misread so egregiously his intentions. Zoran then expressed his fears that these last twenty years had made their destructive impact, transforming the bounds of normal and absurd irrevocably. The fact people could be baited in this way by irony [*ljudi se primaju na ovu priču*], in Zox’s opinion indicated that the moment in which Bosnians could joke about and recognize nationalism in the way the Sarajevo surrealists had done—by staging absolutely ridiculous and exaggerated parodies of nuclear families divided by nationalist grievances, warring in a two bedroom apartment—had passed. This realization for him came with a profound sense of a dual loss: that of a particular way of being in the world, and of unrealized political potentiality. In the first place, Zox lamented that the forms of socialization, which once defined his generation—namely the capacity to read and engage in ironic play—no longer were shared across generations. Even though the popularity of Sarajevo Surrealists continued even in the postwar period and among the generations too young to remember the original cast, the fact many of the scenes from their TV show in late 1980s and early 1990s, scenes too ridiculous and scary, actually came true, recast irony and absurdity in a different way.

Another informant, Darjan, the reluctant leader of Citizen’s Action, often said that all of our lives and political predicaments, were already in the Surrealists. Surrealists had already in

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<sup>35</sup> Forum discussion is available at: <http://www.sarajevo-x.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=57700>

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the *Top List of the Surrealists* and the New Primitiv movement of which they were part, see Levi 2006 and also Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

the late 1980s staged parodies of many dreaded policies and events that came true in the postwar period. These included violent separation of a shared local language into three national languages [that then had to be reformed as to sound sufficiently distinct], and separation of children in schools and kindergartens according to nationalist divisions, which I discuss in the next section. Before the war, Surrealists and their audience poked fun at the nationalist politicians who advocated administrative divisions by staging scenes where walls and checkpoints divided into fragments entire neighborhoods. After the war, such seemingly farfetched scenarios were a part of lived experience. In 2008, Bosnia's cities, neighborhoods, schools and kindergartens were divided, according to principles that once seemed absurd—in a yet another profound reversal, life had successfully imitated art. For Zoran and Darjan, this in turn mean that a certain sense of political possibility was lost; in the world where absurd politics was the real politics, it was difficult to know where to begin changing the existing state of things. And the fact citizens themselves were jolted out of their life-worlds, traumatized and then convinced black was really white and vice-versa, made them into fickle political subjects and uncertain future political allies.

Yet, as Zoran attested, the mere fact there still were generations in Bosnia that remembered that things could look and feel otherwise, generations that remembered a world before the war and different forms of political belonging all together, could also signal that not everything had been lost. "It's *our* generation, the one that remembers, that carries the responsibility to try to change the current order of things...because these new generations have no idea that this world can be different. They cannot even imagine it." In Zox's words, memory and lived experience became itself a force of political potentiality, a site where a certain vision of social, political and ideological normality could be located. Whatever the prewar period was (and as I argue in this dissertation, it was many things, some of which were irreconcilable), it was, according to Zoran, certainly better and more desirable from that which awaits us. And while a political project capable of transforming these memories into a political program does not yet exist, alternative memories linger on in political imaginations and bodies of living generations. Zox's position articulated not only a new sense of the political made out of history, but a new form of political phenomenology. This phenomenology presupposes a particular understanding of temporal experience where future intentionality arises out of prior and past experience, something that Husserl spoke of in terms of retention and protention.

The discordance between the moral repertoires that dominated the prewar period, and the ideological shifts in the postwar moment, engender a range of quite serious, palpable and urgent predicaments in Bosnian society. And nowhere are such predicaments more strongly felt than in the practices of parenting and public education, which serve as sites of production of new political subjects and new collectivities. Hence, I return in the next section to one aspect of Deda Mraz controversy that recasts the problem of normality in a very different light, focusing not so much on the theoretical stakes of defining the separation between normal and absurd, but on the practical problems of raising a new generations of Bosnians. I focus in particular on the campaigns of parent activists in one particular kindergartens in the Sarajevan municipality "Center", which started and carried out a political takeover of the long defunct "parental councils" [*vijeća roditelja*]*—*socialist era intermediary institutions, mediating the relationship between the state and pupils' families*—*in order to propose a challenge to promoters of nationalism and religious separation among children.

*To raise a child: parents, moral upheavals and the role of Deda Mraz*

As mentioned earlier, prior to the notorious Deda Mraz controversy, Sarajevo kindergartens first became a site of intense public interest in 2007, when an initiative to institute religious classes as a part of optional curriculum made its way in through the back door. Vesna, a thirty-four-year old mother of two children who attend one of the public kindergartens in Sarajevo, remembers that she learned about this initiative from her son's teacher, who informally told her such classes were being considered.<sup>37</sup> She, along with all other parents in her son's group, expressed disagreement with this idea, citing as the reason the simple fact that the children were too young for this type of instruction. While Vesna herself insists she can understand why something like this could be important to other parents who had a different opinion and a different relationship to religious tradition, she herself believes that the idea was "a notorious rubbish" whose main purpose was to indoctrinate children and push forward nationalistic agendas in an educational setting where the children were the most vulnerable to such influences. "No one," she told me, "can convince me that a three year old child needs to be taught abstract religious principles in this way. Even theologians consider this age to be simply too young!"

Vesna's professed position on the issue reflected her belief that teaching religion was about exposing children to ideas too difficult and conceptual for their young age. Ironically still, as a secularist and a leftist, she at once both ignored and feared the pedagogical aspect of religious training, which targets practices and embodied dispositions, rather than simply strives for a rational understanding of religious teachings. The argument made by Vesna and her allies at once both denied the possibility that children could understand what was being taught, and rendered the possibility of religious (read also: intolerant, exclusionary and nationalistic) influence on them both imminent and terrifying.<sup>38</sup>

An additional cause for alarm was the fact that Mahmutović herself stood behind this initiative, due likely to her own personal convictions reflected in her Islamic dress and comportment. Over time, Mahmutović became perceived as an agent of the Islamic community and conservative Bosniak nationalists, who were interested in pedagogic institutions as sites where they could exercise their ideological and moral influence over the new generation. The parents and members of the larger publics with whom I spoke, all seem to believe that the introduction of religious instruction and later the banishment of Deda Mraz, indicated that the effort to force new values and practices more proper to nationalist order of things upon children, showed a remarkable degree of planning and systematicity. The Deda Mraz controversy therefore became an echo of the debate on religious instruction, which spread the seeds of what was to become a more substantive campaign to get rid of Mahmutović herself.

As public interest in the kindergartens was waxing and waning throughout 2007 and 2008, reaching apogee during several moments of collective outcry and mobilizations in December 2008 and 2009, a group of parents facing an initially localized problem in one particular kindergarten (the notorious "Butterfly") decided to become more proactive and start

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<sup>37</sup> All of the information I share here regarding Vesna is a direct quotation or paraphrase from the interview I conducted with her in the summer 2010, or otherwise adapted from her media addresses as the spokesperson of the group of parents whose activities I discuss here.

<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Vesna's secularist dispositions cannot be analyzed outside of the political context in which each and every mention of religious practice and identity becomes seen as a vehicle of nationalist politics. This dynamic is made even stronger by the fact confessional membership and religious tradition of one's family provide the basis of ethnic identity (this is especially true for Bosniaks, even though such a reduction of ethnic identity has also been highly criticized).

asking questions about how this public institution was working in the first place. After this group of parents unanimously rejected religious instruction in their kindergartens, their much beloved teacher, the woman who had informed them of the initiative and with whom they had regular and open communication, disappeared from the kindergarten. Eventually, through informal channels, the parents learned that she had been forced to take a medical leave because of her disagreements with director Mahmutović, and possibly also because of her failure to persuade parents to sign their children up for religious instruction. Because this particular teacher was doing so much to assuage the otherwise difficult conditions of work in this kindergarten, marked by poor nutrition, lack of supplies and limited funds, her absence started to exacerbate these problems and make parents more aware of them. It took a couple of months before a group of about ten well-informed and concerned parents started to get the complete picture of the situation—at that point, they decided to write a formal letter to director Mahmutović in order to ask what happened to their favorite teacher. The fact they never received a response to this letter, provided the first step in their gradual but steady political mobilization.

Composed out of college educated professionals, academics, lawyers and otherwise enabled citizens, who possess a range of social connections and resources, this group of parents over the course of the next three years began to work towards unpacking not only the circumstances of their children's teacher's disappearance, but also towards uncovering the formal, legal and financial breaches which were taking place in the "Children of Sarajevo" and the kindergartens under its management. Throughout 2007 and 2008, these parents started asking questions about many other issues, including what happened to the funds they paid for optional foreign language classes, the origin and quality of the foods their children were eating during the day, and finally, the status of parental councils which were supposed to provide an official channel for communication and cooperation between the state and the parents. In the process, they learned that the mandate of the acting Board of Directors had expired and that it was in fact, working illegally, and that its president was misusing his position for personal financial gain.

While their grievances and activities predated the Deda Mraz controversy, the strategic public presentation by parents of the fact holiday festivities were no longer being organized earned these parents allies across the social spectrum. The parents shared the information on the discontinuation of New Year's festivities in the kindergartens with journalists, who then contacted director Mahmutović for comment. Vesna explained that prior to 2008, parents and teachers in her kindergarten worked together to put together these manifestations for children, collecting money, buying ready-made standard packages or alternatively, buying toys and sweets for their own children (and then placing them in identical, nontransparent bags). In 2006, the manifestation included a visit from a real Deda Mraz, a male actor hired to play the role and interact with children. Yet, already in 2007, the manifestation had less support of the management and its organization left much to be desired. Instead of a Deda Mraz impersonator from the outside, one of the teachers in the kindergarten herself dressed up in the Deda Mraz suit. While the children figured out the charade right away, parents appreciated the gesture and did not complain. But in 2008, and then subsequently in 2009, the management started making excuses: first, that such festivities could not be made mandatory because some parents had complained and then that due to flu epidemic (in 2009), such activities posed high risk to the health of children. In 2008, parents solved their dilemmas by staging a the already described Deda Mraz gift giving ceremony outside of the official institution, and with the help of the NGO sector and the social democratic mayor of the municipality Sarajevo-Center.

In 2009, the social democratic mayor of the city of Sarajevo, Alija Behmen, organized a citywide Deda Mraz manifestation in one of the central squares, near the National Theatre. At that time, party lines were clearly drawn: e.g. Social Democrats became the official protectors of Deda Mraz. Remarkably, due to her involvement with the informal group of parents, Vesna herself soon joined to a brand new progressive party, Naša Stranka—a decision she says surprised her the most. Describing herself as an artist trained as a professor of music, and the “most apolitical person”, she nevertheless told me that these particular parental struggles made her realize that she could not forfeit politics because the lives of her son and daughter depended on the decisions which have been and will be made. Vesna’s publicly acknowledged connection to Naša Stranka, and SDP’s public support for the cause of this informal group of parents, in turn opened this initiative to criticism by those who saw the whole struggle as motivated by party politics.

While this party politics certainly played a role in the Deda Mraz controversy, and while the support the SDP and Naša Stranka provided to these parents should be taken with a grain of salt, reducing the Deda Mraz mobilizations to this banal view of politics simply does not do justice to the complex problem space that opened around these issues. Similarly, when I first contacted Vesna with a request for an interview, she insisted vehemently that her activism could not be reduced to efforts to bring Deda Mraz back into kindergartens, but that the matters concerning the functioning of “Children of Sarajevo”—the governmental body overseeing the education of her young children—was a matter of utmost personal and political importance. The institution, she argued, “represents a stereotypical instance of current functioning of our society, which is wallowing in corruption, criminality and nepotism, all hidden behind empty ideologies” (personal communication 2010). The issues themselves “forced” her to become active as a citizen and later as a member of a political party.



**Figure 26:** Poster announcing the Deda Mraz manifestation organized by the City government for the children of Sarajevo kindergartens.

I cannot say with certainty whether all other parents in the informal group shared Vesna's view. But the group definitely emerged as a competent and relevant collective actor, gaining audience with the Minister of Education and Science in the Government of Canton of Sarajevo, who promised to resolve their grievances all the while he has done little to change the governing structure. In a larger scheme of things, making public the debate concerning Sarajevan kindergartens, led to several legal suits and counter suits, by the teacher who was forced out of her position, another pedagogue in a different kindergarten and eventually by Mahmutović herself, when she was removed from her position in early 2010. Her counter-suit guaranteed that she'd stay in position as the director of the organization until the court had made its decision (at the present moment, she remains in charge). Meanwhile, the parents continue to organize and elect representatives in the parental councils from their own ranks. As of 2010, the political saga featuring Arzija Mahmutović is also continuing; the director even now has her own popular song.

These “kindergarten mobilizations” were remarkable for many reasons, including the resourcefulness and persistence of parents who opted not to register a formal organization, planning instead the take over the parental councils and focusing on lobbying as informal group. By bringing the controversy to light, these parents-activists showed that they understood the power of socialist era symbols and values, and were willing to combine them with both new and old tools for political engagement. As I discuss in the next chapter, in their efforts to institute a better, more transparent, more fair and responsible system of governance in the kindergartens—and ultimately oust a director whom they saw not only as ideologically dangerous but also corrupt and dictatorial—they seemed to be proposing a model of governance that sits well with values propagated by the International community. Vesna herself told me that contrary to everyone's assumptions, she is not a socialist as much as she is a legalist—a person who believes in the rule of law. Nevertheless, the parents received public support not only because their campaigns coincided with a wave of demands for greater governmental accountability and passionate critiques of corruption and immorality of governing institutions and officials. It also resonated because it strategically made use of affective attachments to symbols and values of Yugoslav socialism, namely multinationalism and its herald, Deda Mraz.

### *Guardians of Normality: Parental anxieties, divided schools, and future of Bosnia*

Dramatic gestures and emergent political arguments such as the ones I have chronicled in this chapter only make sense if they are situated in the political environment of postwar Bosnia, where the war and subsequent political arrangements led to a number of institutionalized forms of segregation and discrimination. While ethnically divided schools have for nearly a decade been a reality in some parts Bosnia, they also continue to be perceived (for a variety of political agendas) as some of the most powerful and visible signals of pervasive moral bankruptcy and the failure of postwar nation building (Kolind 2007; Hromadžić 2008). Along with an explosion of public interest in the issue of violent youth crime,<sup>39</sup> the Bosnian educational system(s) is one of the most powerful sites for exploration of adult anxieties about younger generations.

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<sup>39</sup> Since early 2008, the rise of violent crime among and perpetrated by youth has been on the front pages of newspapers. In February 2008, a 16-year-old boy by the name of Denis Mrnjavac, was stabbed in a tram full of people, by three of his peers. The act was completely random and allegedly motivated by the fact young Mrnjavac was “looking” at these boys in a way they did not appreciate. The nature of the act, its shocking scenario and the fact no one in the tram responded, stunned the entire city. When the media subsequently uncovered the fact government was doing nothing about a problem of rising youth crime of which

Like the educational system, which relies on cooperation between the adults who educate, and the children who form the student body, Deda Mraz is a figure that brings together two generations, helping them bond through a shared ritual. Such an observation has already been made in Levi-Strauss' text (1952) on the banishment of Pere Noel in postwar France, amidst local concerns of increasing Americanization of Christmas. This magical figure, as the esteemed anthropologist argued, provides the material and moral links that bring together two generations: the one that believes in the winter wonder, and the other that puts up the charade. In postwar Bosnia, Deda Mraz therefore brings together not only children of different ethnic and religious origin, but also two generations which were defined by two distinct hegemonic political projects and their associated dominant discursive frames. The older generation that came of age during socialist egalitarianism and "brotherhood and unity" is now raising its progeny within the framework of "constitutive peoples", the current euphemisms describing Bosnia's post-war politics of difference. Despite the wartime violence and post-war sedimentation of national divisions, many parents remain attached to the Yugoslav socialist values and experiences that defined their childhoods.

The clash of these two moral frameworks became apparent in the course of the emotionally charged debate concerning the institution of religious instruction in the preschool curriculum and later, the banning of socialist Santa Claus from the kindergartens. Mahmutović's own advocacy was seen as yet another phase of forceful introduction of nationalist politics into schools with the goal of producing a new generation for whom both nationalist ideological positions and the existing modes of segregation created by Dayton agreement would quietly become the norm. By being separated, critics argued, children were taught "difference" in a pedagogically and morally unacceptable way, becoming pawns in efforts of nationalist elites to assure mechanisms of reproduction of the post-war status quo. Parents married to spouses of different ethnic background, or other parents in opposition because of political and philosophical reasons, for months circulated petitions looking to prevent religious instruction at this level.

Despite this activism, the initiative was put into motion, resulting, as was feared, in institution of only Islamic religious instruction. When the argumentation based on religious and ethnic difference was again employed by Mahmutović to rid the kindergartens of Deda Mraz, many of latter's defenders saw the controversy as yet another forceful, politically orchestrated and ill advised attempt of the nationalists to produce a new symbolic order and deny what many saw as "normal" and fondly remembered aspects of their personal identity and family traditions. Expulsion of such shared remnants of the past was by many seen as continuation of the war by other means. For example, organizers of the aforementioned Facebook group in defense of Deda Mraz claimed that "Sarajevo," as the key symbol of interethnic conviviality,<sup>40</sup> did not fall in 1992, but in 2008. For a part of the population which despite the events of the past two decades remained largely unconvinced by nationalist political logic and deeply worried about its effect on the generations growing up amidst institutionalized ethnic divisions, the Deda Mraz controversy

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they have been aware for several years, couple of hundred of Sarajevans gathered in protest and threw stones, eggs and fruits on the governmental building. This event began a veritable political avalanche, leading to a series of mass demonstrations that went on for several months. While initially provoked by anger over the governmental handling of the situation, and by newly articulated fears about crisis of the youth as future embodied, the demands of the protestors began to speak to something much larger than the issue of youth crime—governmental accountability and the need for substantive political change. See Ch4

<sup>40</sup> I borrow the term conviviality from Paul Gilroy (2007) in order to break out of the limits of terms like coexistence and tolerance, which appear problematic to many of my ethnographic informants. As I understand it, in contrast to coexistence, conviviality implies a shared life, amidst disagreements and conflict. It suggests that the preferable form of sociality is the one where communities live with and through each other, not side-by-side. This notion of community is the best translation of the Bosnian term "zajednički život" (trans. a life in common) that I have so far found.



seemed to quench the last glimmer of hope that some practices and symbols from the socialist era that had the capacity to call into being forms of sociality that transcended ethnonationalist divisions could be preserved.

While conducting research in Jajce, I learned just how attached many Bosnians were to the preservation of these shared practices. Even while these same persons themselves participated in warfare and often deployed nationalist arguments, they frequently also expressed their fears about how these institutionalized divisions were going to affect the welfare and future of their children. Weekly, I heard reports from horrified adults who had overheard children echo during play the very same nationalist arguments often used by adults [sometimes in rather tragic and comic forms].

It would be misleading to dismiss the adults' contradictory reactions as a sings of insidious ideological confusion that has resulted out of the chaos of the 1990s. Attachments to preserving a sense of inhabiting the same world, including sharing certain symbols like Deda Mraz, also cannot be reduced to mere nostalgic longings of a generation whose time has past. The dynamic way in which this controversy played out and the actual responses it produced demonstrate that these sentiments are in fact part and parcel of complex ongoing struggles to define desirable forms of community, personhood and ethics, seen as crucial for enabling a more hopeful future. They also posit the fact that nationalist categories, as well as challenges to them, exist in fluid and sometimes mutually reinforcing forms. Antinationalism, just like its "evil" twin, does not exist as a singular political project, or as a stable ideology (Jansen 2005). Moreover, deployment of socialist era symbols for present day political purposes does not exist in a vacuum and ought to be rigorously studied for the claims it makes and the effects it produces.

Scholars of postsocialist transformations have from the beginning been interested in understanding the legacies of socialism in countries moving towards market economy and democratic models of governance. These discussions have posed important questions about the complex ways in which postsocialist persons relate to their past experiences now that the world and the states that enabled them no longer exists. The insights produced by researchers of post-socialist nostalgia have been important for undermining triumphant ideological narratives coming both from the West and the new generation of anticommunists and nationalists in the region proper. Here, I've cast Deda Mraz not so much as a remnant of a lost era, but as an important site for exploration of ongoing political struggles.

When the oppositional Social Democratic party (the historical inheritor of the League of Communists) organized a public protest in defense of Deda Mraz in December 2008, it used the symbolic capital of this figure to draw support in the larger voting body, criticize the current government and call for special election. It did so because it recognized that figures like Deda Mraz<sup>41</sup> not only reflect existence of alternative forms of knowledge and value, but they also pose a challenge to nationalist and anticommunist discourses that have been dominant since the 1990s. A number of my informants in Sarajevo saw this act of the said political party in very cynical terms, alleging that the Social Democrats were also trying to politicize something that did not belong to them.

In other words, the antinationalist opposition was not shielded from criticisms that rested on arguments that Deda Mraz was not a political symbol, but an ordinary part of childhood joy.

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<sup>41</sup> The politics of usage of socialist era symbols in campaigns of the Social Democratic Party in Bosnia deserves its own chapter, or possibly a dissertation. The most fascinating of those figures is the one of Marshal Tito himself—who is downplayed or exalted depending on the audience, occasion and purpose.

This ordinariness and presumed “apolitical” nature was often an aspect of passionate defenses of Deda Mraz, such as in a case of one commentator on the online forums, who proclaimed: “You make me sick! You are all sick! What normal person could be bothered by Deda Mraz?” During an episode of the talk show “Pošteno” (trans. “Honestly”) dedicated to the issue, one of the guests, Bosnian writer Fadila Nura Haver asked: “What did this Deda Mraz do? Did he hit a child? Did he do something bad? So much negativity over something that was pure happiness!” By asserting the benign, innocent nature of Deda Mraz, and his positive role in childhood imagination, such rhetorical questions sought to delegitimize the attacks of those who saw him both as a symbol of communism and as an imposed, fabricated figure that had little real relation to the identity and tradition of cotemporary Bosnians.

Particularly interesting here are the claims Deda Mraz was an innocent, sincere, and joyous part of ordinary childhoods. These claims bear a lot of resemblance to what Alexei Yurchak (2008) has recently identified as “new sincerity”—a philosophy of recuperation of positive, utopian elements of socialism in art and other creative pursuits mainly in postsocialist Russia. While Deda Mraz has not so far been a figure of interest in this movement, other characters like the pioneers (especially young girls) and Gagarin, the Soviet cosmonaut, have all been made subjects of works by artists who associate themselves with this project. But the emphasis on sincerity, rather than cynicism, which was the main modality or relating to these symbols during late socialism, suggests that something very interesting is emerging here, both in the representational practices and the political imaginations of postsocialist subjects.

I wish to take claims of innocence and sincerity seriously, and further contend that Deda Mraz’s political nature belongs to an entirely different order from the one that seems to be suggested by those who see him as communist era fabrication or a useful icon for new election campaigns. The fact that for many people Deda Mraz remained a “normal” part of life, testifies to the fact the relationship between post-socialist persons and their socialist era experiences remains far more complex than the rhetoric of both “fabrication” present on the Right and normality on contemporary Left (which wishes to operationalize such memories for its own purposes) would suggest. Even more important than articulated political positions are the surviving ethnical dispositions from the former era, which exist in uneasy relationship to lived realities, but also carry a unique political potential.

Perhaps the most ambiguous aspect of the Deda Mraz controversy was the way in which its presumed universality in the context of postwar Bosnia became seen as a part of an arsenal that would ultimately enable the eventual constitution of the common nation-state that could equally be home to Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Yet, the very “problem” and the related debates about Deda Mraz seem to only have emerged in the Muslim-Croat part of Bosnia, the Federation (and within it, most prominently Sarajevo) despite occasional nationalistically motivated commentaries coming from Republika Srpska alleging the controversy was part of the plot to turn Bosnia into an Islamic caliphate. Ironically, according to media pronouncements of the Minister of Education in Republika Srpska, in that part of Bosnia which is home to most of Bosnian Serbs, Deda Mraz has quietly been replaced by a physically indistinguishable but religious and particularistic character of St. Nicholas, and the related New Year’s festivities almost unnoticeably transferred (“back”) onto a Christian Orthodox holiday dedicated to this saint, which takes place on December 19. The uneven status of Deda Mraz is a signal of larger incongruence and most certainly casts a shadow of doubt on such hopes that the symbols of Yugoslav socialism can effectively become mobilized as means of unifying divided post-war Bosnia (especially since the narratives describing the dissolution of the shared Yugoslav state

remain profoundly contested on all “sides”). Nevertheless, as the events of December 2008 prove, socialist symbols also won’t be abandoned to the oblivion of history. Figures like Deda Mraz in fact provide some of the best sites for exploration of how Yugoslav socialist legacies continue to impact contemporary political discourse, but also personal and collective moral imaginaries.

Although the Deda Mraz controversy opened many complex questions, including how to interpret legacies of the communist era, or what constitutes a “tradition”, my focus in this chapter lied with making sense of why so many Bosnians, parents especially, defended this seemingly banal socialist era symbol. By exploring parental anxieties, rhetoric on the moral crisis of education and political interventions that intersected in the figure of Deda Mraz, I argued that such socialist era motifs and their associated practices are increasingly becoming enlisted in the post-war period as symbols of oppositional politics and antinationalism, particularly in the parts of Bosnia governed by an alliance between Muslims and Croats. In this way, I suggested that the very possibility of a unified and viable Bosnian state becomes seen as hinging upon the preservation and re-mobilization of Yugoslav moral and symbolic orders that affirm the value of multinationalism. Yet, as I contend towards the end, such modes of reinterpretation of the socialist era political and ethical frames may not be evenly distributed across the ethno-territorial partitions created by the war and particular national groups composing modern-day Bosnia.

## CHAPTER 4: SARAJEVO'S SPRING OF DISCONTENT: YOUTH, PUBLIC SAFETY AND MATTERS OF CARE IN POSTWAR BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

In late afternoon of February 5, 2008, a 16-year-old high honor-roll student, Denis Mrnjavac, was beaten and fatally stabbed by a group of three teenagers in a tram traveling through downtown Sarajevo. Mrnjavac was on his way home from school when he encountered a group of three rabble-rousers at his usual tram stop. The boys did not know each other; the youngest one in the group merely accused Mrnjavac of “looking at them funny.” Once the passengers entered the train, the three attacked Mrnjavac, beating him with bras knuckles. In the final moments, the youngest one pulled a knife. Even though the tram was full of people, no one among the other riders attempted to stop the attack or apprehend the killers. The driver, having realized something was going on in the back of the tramcar, pulled the break and alerted the police and the paramedics. By then, help came too late. Mrnjavac died in the hospital in the early hours of the following day from the wounds he endured during the attack.

Local media outlets reported on the story almost immediately. The police spent the night apprehending the attackers, but the public outrage over the tragedy was already building. Mrnjavac's murder, by all accounts random and a product of a banal confrontation, presented the last in a series of particularly gruesome crimes committed by underage offenders that same winter. A few weeks prior to Mrnjavac tragedy, another underage boy who would become known in the media as “Robert M,” set on fire and killed an old woman, Ljubica Spasojević, allegedly over money owned and some dispute over a musical instrument.<sup>1</sup> Newspaper pages and online forums were flooding with stories about crimes committed by underage offenders. Investigative analyses of journalists<sup>2</sup> suggested that institutional mechanisms for prevention and sanction of underage offenders had collapsed, so much so that in some cases, convicted juveniles could not be held responsible or punished for the crimes they committed. Rumors circulated that seasoned criminals were recruiting youngsters for their dirty work, exploiting the gaps in the criminal system. Parents worried about the safety of their own children; seniors lamented they no longer felt safe leaving their homes after dark. A city that only thirteen years earlier emerged out of “the longest military siege in modern history” was beginning to feel to its residents unsafe yet again.

The 2008 murders made all the more urgent the growing postwar preoccupations with matters of security on the streets, juvenile offenders, armed robberies and the collapse of criminal justice system. Despite their ubiquitous presence, such obsessions seem to bear a limited relationship to the available data on crime, which suggest Sarajevo is a relatively safe compared to other European capitals.<sup>3</sup> They belong, however, to an important genre of everyday

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<sup>1</sup>Robert M was well known to local police authorities because he was a multiple offender, but since he was underage, the cantonal prosecutor had no recourse for his punishment because the juvenile section in the prison was already full, and no other facility provided an alternative for his sanction and/or rehabilitation. He continued to commit other petty crimes throughout 2009 (Source: EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina <http://www.eupm.org/Details.aspx?ID=706&TabID=5>).

<sup>2</sup>All major newspapers in the country ran such analyses in the aftermath of Mrnjavac's murder (e.g. Škuletić 2008; Mijatović 2008; Mešetović 2008; Nurkić & Bačanović 2008; Mujkić 2008a; Đozo 2008). For critical commentary on the rise of this issue see Avdić 2008. Dračo 2010 also offers an analysis “youth delinquent” as a media construct.

<sup>3</sup>Sarajevo Police Department and Ministries of Security often reiterate this claim (e.g. Mujkić 2006, 2); unfortunately, its accuracy is difficult to verify because various relevant agencies in Bosnia have not standardized their record keeping nor are able—despite various technocratic interventions of the IC—to produce authoritative countrywide statistics. As a consequence, the slot reserved for Bosnia on Eurostat reports on violent crime in Europe remains empty, barring easy comparison. However, there is some data on the trends in criminal offenses. In its latest report for 2010, the Bosnian Ministry of Security claims that

discourse, which narrates the experience of the postwar “crisis” as it is lived and embodied. The circulation of such complaints, anecdotes and rumors often serves as a placeholder for other forms of action. This traffic of words reminds that although citizens of Bosnia have numerous and varied grievances about the failures of postwar reconstruction and reform, they usually do not have much faith in their own capacity to produce meaningful political change. But following a string of disturbing events, for some of Sarajevo’s residents, things were about to change.

A few days later, the murdered boy’s classmates invited the city’s inhabitants to join them in the march of mourners, a gathering whose political potential no one among its participants really anticipated. This assembly would subsequently spark the largest wave of protests in the city since the antiwar demonstrations of 1992, emboldening local activists and international reformers who had long hoped for such a massive grassroots mobilization. In their eyes, Sarajevans were starting to put into practice a model of engaged citizenship that various internationally sponsored projects of postwar civil society building had been promoting in Bosnia for over thirteen years. The lethargic city sleeping in the mountain encircled valley, whose residents were said to be more interested in spending their hours in cafes than fighting for social change, after thirteen years of post war daze had “finally” revolted.

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How did a tragic act of youth violence accomplish something that years of civil society building and promotion of participatory democracy in postwar Bosnia could not, namely: bring about the most massive and sustained wave of grassroots mobilizations for political change? What could turn the rise of violent juvenile crime and the (re)emergence of very figure of “youth delinquent” into a rallying cry? More to the point, under what conditions could such an “apolitical” event achieve all this in a country distinguished by a profound disillusionment with democratic procedures? In this chapter, I pursue answers to these questions by ethnographically analyzing the political transformations this wave of protests made both known and possible. They help illuminate the links between historical experience and political action, parenting and the state, responsibility and shame, all of which are of central interest to this project as a whole.

In the first part of this chapter, I trace the chronology of events and work through some of the dominant ways in which these protests had originally been described and analyzed. In order to provide a context to many of the grievances expressed by the protesters, I look at the central place of youth as a target of government intervention, during socialism and after it. Notably, I link questions of youth delinquency to ubiquitous concerns about the disappearance of the state as an orchestrator and nurturer of social life. I argue that the subsequent calls of protesters for greater governmental “accountability” [*odgovornost*] must be understood in relation to these preceding practices and philosophies of state care, and expectations they created, rather than be reduced to a derivative form of a neoliberal rationality (see Kipnis 2007; 2008, see also Rogers 2010). In the second part of this chapter, I shift my focus towards the protesters themselves and the ways they explained their participation in the protests. Through two portraits, I offer a complimentary argument about the 2008 protests and their relationship to wartime traumas and predicaments of postwar parenting.

Throughout this chapter, I draw on my long-term fieldwork among some of the most ardent participants of these protests, who emerged out of them as bona fide political activists despite never having previously done activist work. Because I commenced my fieldwork less

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during the first six months, the total number of felonies has fallen by 1.43%, while a total number of misdemeanors (related to public safety) has gone up by 3.68% (Ministarstvo Sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine 2010, 4).

than two months after the protests had come to a halt, I have reconstructed the chain of events on the basis of my subsequent ethnographic research among the protesters, the written record of their correspondences, media reports, various protest memorabilia, photographs and video materials. In analyzing this material, I suggest that Mrnjavac's murder emerged as a critical event (see Das 1995) that cut through the fabric of everyday life, demanding a reaction from a population that had been, and with good reason, preoccupied with surviving the uncertainties of postwar period. As I show in subsequent sections of this analysis, youth violence evoked not only the memory of wartime trauma but also the spectrality of the Yugoslav socialist state and its promises of care and security. The Mrnjavac tragedy became such a powerful catalyst precisely because the protesting public saw it as a consequence of elementary failings of the new and dysfunctional postwar state, which is always measured against the one that it succeeded. Coming into the streets, the protesters refused to see Mrnjavac's murder as an isolated, banal incident or as evidence of rising nationalist tensions. They instead took up against the key officials in the city and cantonal governments,<sup>4</sup> the insolent ruling elites and the new political culture of indolence and negligence. By coming into the street, this new brand of activist insisted on more engaged forms of intervention and care on behalf of the fragmented, highly bureaucratic, massive, yet strangely absent postwar state.<sup>5</sup>

In subsequently organizing their demands under the banner of "odgovornost" [accountability], the protestors appeared to at once harness political formulations made available by projects of postwar democratization, while invoking historically resonant yet incredibly plastic arguments about moral responsibility of government. As I suggest above, these evolving forms of political thinking and action provide more than the evidence of an emergent neoliberal rationality set on formalizing the rule of law and producing a managerial state with clear procedural standards. Instead, they help channel thick histories of reconfiguration of the relationship between state and society and make known complex horizons of expectations out of which these protests emerged. Hence, my analysis looks to the anthropological conceptualization of accountability and Bakhtin's understanding of social responsibility in art –to propose an alternative casing of *answerable politics*, which is based on impetus for care and capacity to feel shame.

## **Part I: The protests**

### *Do governments have a capacity for shame? Institutional failure and citizen dissent*

The chain of protests that took place between February 9<sup>th</sup> and May 9<sup>th</sup> surprised most observers as well as many of the participants. It also ushered in a multifaceted, complex and charged political mobilization in which tens of thousands of Sarajevans participated. Due to the lack of space, I will focus on the general character of the protests, their chronology and the

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<sup>4</sup> As a reminder, per provisions of the Dayton Agreement, Bosnia has been divided into two entities: Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The Federation has ten cantons, including the Canton of Sarajevo. Residents of the capital therefore rely on one of the four municipal governments, city administration (which only has symbolic powers) and the government of Canton of Sarajevo. Matters of juvenile crime rely on cooperation between the Cantonal Government and the Federal Government, and the cantonal police and the prosecutors. The Federal Government in turn is in charge of the overarching policies and legislature, which the cantons are supposed to enforce.

<sup>5</sup> When protests ceased, much of this energy was channeled into lobbying and advocacy, organized within a newly registered citizens association born out of these mobilizations. While I do not examine this transformation in detail here, I will say that this transformation represents a certain domestication of these mobilization on behalf of formal NGO sectors and their sponsors who prefer such strategies to less conventional and more loosely organized forms of political action.

effects they had on reconfiguration of local political relations.

Following the news of the murder, Mrnjavac's classmates and professors from the Catholic School Center invited Sarajevans to express grief and concern through a public gathering in front of the Sacred Heart Cathedral. From there, the crowd walked through the main street carrying photographs of the deceased and banners with various messages. Adding to the political character of the gathering, Mrnjavac's schoolmates brought a banner asking "How many more Denises?" They purportedly addressed this question not only to the larger public, but also the local government, and its various agencies in charge of public security, including the police and the Office of the Prosecutor. Furthermore, during the walk through the city, the protesters deliberately stopped and chanted in front of government headquarters, demanding a reaction from officials. Participants with whom I spoke suggested that the crowd improvised many of its steps that day because it was unsure of how to best make use of the assembled bodies and concentrated affect.



**Figure 27:** Citizens in front of the Secret Heart Cathedral, demanding resignations [*ostavke*]. Sarajevo, spring 2008. Photo courtesy of Ervin Berbić

While the first protest gave initial momentum to the subsequent gatherings, the complete political escalation did not take place until the second protest on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February. The second meeting set the stage for another incident, which some identified as being just as important to the process of political mobilization as the murder itself. In the week following the tragedy, the public learned the details about how the city came to no longer have the means of sanctioning

violent underage offenders. Due to a combination of factors, including Dayton enforced institutional fragmentation (which stripped the city government of many of its powers while making the cantonal government reliant on federal institutions), poorly implemented reforms and the perpetual lack of funding, experts, and political will— no specialized institutions for juveniles or prisons of the kind that existed in the socialist era functioned since the end of the war.<sup>6</sup>

While provoking rage and disbelief, these exposés created an opportunity to action. The cantonal government called for an urgent meeting the ministerial cabinet solely dedicated to the problem of deteriorating public safety. As it turned out, the government had already been aware of the dysfunction within the juvenile system. In 2006, the Federal parliament passed the “Strategy for the prevention and sanction of youth delinquency.” This strategy—created under the pressure of the International Community—offered a complex plan of reform, attending to both the prevention and sanction of youth offenses.<sup>7</sup> However, despite its adoption, two years down the line, the Government of the Canton of Sarajevo had not yet produced a mandatory plan of action, let alone implemented the document’s recommendations. In the context of rising public dissatisfaction, such a gross omission only served as further proof of incompetence and disinterest of the governing institutions.

The cantonal government hoped to patch up and perhaps hide the problem when it met to plan its long overdue implementation of the Strategy. But political activists saw this as an opportunity to invite citizens to express their outrage at the fact the government had been

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<sup>6</sup> According to an investigation on the topic issued in the political magazine *Dani* (Days) in 2006, in absence of rehabilitative centers in charge of socialization, underage offenders became the responsibility of social workers, to whom they were supposed to report. But the social workers lacked the means to sanction these youths if they stopped showing up. In the meantime, the police department did undergo different types of training for handling underage suspects (this was organized with international support). In 2001, plans were made for opening of the Disciplinary Center on the outskirts of Sarajevo, which would be an alternative to incarceration for youth that has committed less grave crimes, but this did not happen until 2006 when one such center did open in the suburb of Vogošća. At that time, and even after the events in 2008 that I describe here, one huge obstacle to establishing such centers was the resistance of the local communities that were chosen as possible locations for such institutions. According to experts, community leaders feared the effects such a center would have on the safety of their own towns. Ironically, by giving the right of vote to communities in the new democratic framework, it became more difficult to make things happen. Moreover, these types of centers can only accommodate boys between the ages of 14-18 years (younger than 14 cannot be held legally responsible under the new Bosnian laws), and keep them for 20 days, after which their fate is uncertain. In the meantime, youth that has committed murders and other violent crimes, in the Muslim Croat Federation can be sentenced to prison time in the juvenile wing of the Zenica penitentiary (another city about 40 miles north of Sarajevo), where most of them come in contact with adult and more seasoned criminals, and not infrequently leave the prison in worse shape. See Karup-Druško & Nirikić 2006. Karup-Druško published another related story in the same magazine in 2005, about the 14-year-old Samir R., who had already committed a murder, sexual assault and numerous other criminal acts, but due to his age and severity of his needs, no institution was willing or equipped to take him. His offenses became so numerous and frequent, the Cantonal government suggested that the psychiatric ward of the city’s hospital take him in until another solution is found (even though examiners determined there was no underlying psychological or emotional disorder for which he could be treated, other than history of neglect and abuse). Eventually, the government got very involved in his case, even finding an apartment where he could be held and supervised, but he escaped and went on the street, where he became a drug user and continued to commit various crimes. The case of Samir R, became one of the iconic proofs of the dysfunctional nature of the entire system—after this, the cantonal government started to develop the poorly implemented Strategy.

<sup>7</sup> This Strategy is a complex, multifaceted document developed by local experts under the patronage of various international governing bodies, including OSCE, Council of Europe, UNICEF, and even some Western European Embassies. It identifies various legal, institutional, pedagogic measures and planned reforms, which are to be inscribed in the law, implemented by four different ministries, and put into motion by a plethora of agencies. Yet, the strategy also proposes a model of intervention, rehabilitation and sanction that surpasses the state, and includes various other actors, such as local NGOs and citizens associations. In 2009, the Human Rights Office in Tuzla, an NGO/Think Tank/Advocacy group published an analysis of this Strategy, whose content offers clues about new norms of conduct promoted in the postwar period. The local team of experts underlines the importance of compliance with the EU standards, which include separation in law and practice of the juvenile system from the rest of criminal justice, less emphasis on institutions (which is described as an atavistic tendency leftover from the former system), and more accent on rehabilitation and prevention, rather than punishment.



ignoring the rising numbers of juvenile offenders. Two local organizations, DOSTA/Zašto ne? [Enough/Why not?] and Center for the Promotion of Civil Society, both of which had previously worked on increasing political engagement among citizens, invited people to express their outrage by protesting in front of the government offices during the officials' meeting. Riding the momentum, a group of a several hundred people gathered in front of the building housing cantonal ministries. The incensed protesters, many of them youngsters, proceeded to throw stones, eggs, and fruit on the government building in the midst of the Cabinet's meeting, breaking the windows and damaging the newly renovated pastel façade.

The scene culminated in the confrontation between the indignant, and up to that point not widely known, Cantonal Prime Minister, Samir Silajdžić, and Demir Mahmutčehajić, an activist from DOSTA.<sup>8</sup> As the crowds continued to boo and throw objects, Mahmutčehajić decided to enter the building in the company of cameras in order to reason with the officials inside. Silajdžić caused a scene by accusing Mahmutčehajić and other activists of antagonizing the crowd and frightening his young son, who had telephoned his “daddy” to ask about the ruckus in front of the government headquarters. When Mahmutčehajić spontaneously asked him why he does not admit the mistake and just resign, Silajdžić retorted with claims the local government was full of moral and honest people such as himself, who conducted themselves with dignity and respect [*ja vas gledam svijetla obraza*, lit: my cheek (honor) is clean]. The footage of this screaming match was broadcast on several TV channels. Many Sarajevans found Silajdžić's performance off-putting and hypocritical, and illustrative of the impudence common among government officials. To make matters worse, Silajdžić's recourse to the trauma of his son would subsequently earn him the nickname “Daddy” which caricatured him as a small time, paternalistic tyrant.

The marshalling effects of the televised quarrel continued the following day when Silajdžić used public revenues to pay for commercial space in two daily newspapers to publish his highly criticized “Official Statement of the Government of Canton of Sarajevo in regards to the staged violence in front of the headquarters of the Canton of Sarajevo.” The statement included such rhetorical constructs as “the events were caused by anti-civilizational and anarchist impulse of two non-governmental organizations” and “this morbidly staged uprising against the Government and its Prime Minister, tied to manipulation of children...[was an] effectively planned scenario for the destabilization of the most successful Canton and the city of Sarajevo as the capital...initiated and prepared outside of our borders.” The announcement ended with the following statement: “this government is composed out of honest and moral people whose biographies, property registers, and other private and professional references are a matter of public record.” Several people told me that this statement reminded them of the worst of socialist era ideological rhetoric, and provoked in them infinite disgust. Forty-eight year old Iris asked me: “Have they no shame?” To Iris, Silajdžić's announcement compounded the injury and insult

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<sup>8</sup> The NGO “Zašto ne?” (Why not?), which stood behind “Enough” also channeled the funds literally given to protestors by Open Society Fund as the events were unraveling, which went for all sorts of logistical expenses (and as it was later discovered, some unexplained other costs). By the summer 2008, a portion of the protestors who had for months called themselves simply “Citizens of Sarajevo” was already talking about the possibility of registering as an organization. Passionate and fascinating debates took place over the virtues and limits of formalization and the possibilities offered by remaining informal, which divided protestors into camps that were sometimes coterminous with the established division of labor that emerged among the most active organizers (for example, the creative producers-- *kreativci*—in general seemed the least interested in founding a formal NGO). When the organization, “Citizen Action” was founded in late summer 2008, after deliberations and series of meetings and negotiations, a core formed, made up of professionals, PR personnel, street activists and youth volunteers—while most of the creative producers did not become official members, they continued to participate in the activities, produce materials and maintain their social and personal connections with the other members.

exposed by the circumstances under which Mrnjavac lost his life. She and others with whom I spoke focused not on the criminality of government's actions, which they saw as typical, and unsurprising, but Silajdžić's mode of address, which treated his constituents like brainless dupes.



**Figure 28:** Citizens marching through the Marshal Tito Boulevard, carrying signs "Daddy, mommy, resign!" Sarajevo, spring 2008. Photo courtesy of Ervin Berbić

In latter reflections, some emerging political organizers focused on the productive power of this statement because its alienating rhetoric inspired Sarajevans to march in order to prove they were neither “anti-civilizational”, “anarchist” or foreign destabilization agents, but (as they would soon begin calling themselves), “Citizens<sup>9</sup> of Sarajevo.”<sup>10</sup> They argued that Silajdžić’s performance called the protests into being even more than Mrnjavac’s tragedy. Soon, crowds of up to seven thousand Sarajevans would take to the streets for many consecutive Saturdays, all the way until the month of May, to peacefully and sometimes very creatively, demand first and foremost his resignation. Quickly after, they started to also call for the removal of the mayor, Semiha Borovac, who denounced the protestors and came out in Silajdžić’s support. Through an ironic slip of tongue, Borovac also proclaimed herself “the mother of Sarajevo,” prompting protesters to award her the nickname “Mommy” which created a strange circle of mockery between the mayor and the Prime Minister Silajdžić. Indeed, protesters relished in addressing the officials in these sardonic terms, mocking their failures to provide the right kind of paternalistic care, which they sought to embody in their public addresses to constituents. Behind the seemingly playful nature of these nicknames stood their intention to shame, to subject to social discipline and ridicule behaviors that were detrimental to the wellbeing of the social body

<sup>9</sup> In Bosnian, the term “Građani” carries the dual meaning of “residents” and “citizens.” In the protesters’ deployment of this term, both aspects of the meaning are present.

<sup>10</sup> In spite of such “official” proclamations by the protesters, during the demonstrations and well after them, many of my informants raised questions about the extent to which agents of the government, International Community and even foreign embassies had infiltrated their ranks. Anxieties about spies and saboteurs abounded during much of my fieldwork between 2008 and 2011. While I have no means of assessing the plausibility of these narratives, after three years of fieldwork, I have grown uncomfortable with dismissing these accusations as mere penchant for conspiracy theories.

at large.<sup>11</sup> The mommy-daddy jokes were but one in the arsenal of clever, humorous interventions that the protesters would develop as protests spread over the next few months.

*What is the color of the “Bosnian Spring”? Beyond nationalist mobilization, civil society model and democracy promotion*

Many observers interpreted the series of protests that followed February 15th debacle in front of the cantonal government, as the *much needed* “Bosnian spring.” To international overseeing organizations, this “uprising” signaled that all might not be lost for a country that thirteen years after the war remained entrapped by nationalist factionalism, weak institutions, widespread corruption and the seeming indifference of its citizens. During one of my field interviews, the director of a major international funding agency in Sarajevo offered that after years of the International Community’s<sup>12</sup> unsuccessful attempts to mold an active citizenry, the spontaneous city protests had somehow given birth to a new and “authentic” Bosnian civil society, and had done so “all on their own!”<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 29:** April 6 protests in Sarajevo. Photo courtesy of Ervin Berbić

But what appeared to be an authentic, grassroots mobilization stemming from a unified political front in the accounts of my informants emerged as a series of complex power struggles and chaotic negotiations. These were neither divorced from local or civil society politics nor predicated on transparent understandings of proper modalities of (active) citizenship. Although the February 15<sup>th</sup> protest, as mentioned took place at the invitation of two established activist

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<sup>11</sup> The most recognizable form of this rhetorical strategy involves “bringing someone down (to earth)” [*spustiti ga*] by exposing him as boastful, immodest or arrogant. The double meaning of this argot also has a sexual connotation; it could be read as a form of symbolic castration.

<sup>12</sup> From hereon after, I will refer to the International Community simply by its acronym, the IC.

<sup>13</sup> Eventually though, through the brokerage of the Open Fund Society and their financial support, a portion of these protestors was in fact partly domesticated into an actual formal NGO (see note vi and the next one following), though the results of this process were partial and possibly more detrimental than helpful.

groups, “DOSTA” (Enough) and “Grozđ”—both self-professed “movements,” attached to registered NGOs built from foreign donations—these two organizations later refused to take responsibility for the actions of the angry protesters, claiming they merely invited people to come but were not the formal organizers of the event. This retreat and the existing antipathies towards formal activist organizations lead to further delegitimization of these groups among the protestors, who proceeded to self-organize. However, DOSTA and Grozđ continued to support these protests, providing logistical support, equipment and manpower. Moreover, Mahmutćehajić’s spur-of-the-moment request for resignation remained one of the central demands of the protestors, despite the fact the validity of such demand was never discussed. The rift also opened space for new personalities to emerge as leaders, while also making possible an even higher degree of heterogeneity in the demands protestors addressed to the government. These new actors began to call themselves simply “citizens” seeking to differentiate their position from that of the formal NGO sector, which has had an overwhelmingly negative reputation in Bosnia since at least the early 2000s.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, while a few important donor agencies channeled some funds into the logistical support of the protests, many of the everyday costs were simply bankrolled by donations in cash and kind by participants and their supporters.

The bulk of the organizing and discussions among the organizers took place online. Protesters made use of new technologies, mobilizing over discussion forums and internet blogs and making extensive use of social networking. For these reasons and more, Sarajevo’s protests looked at the surface level much like the Eastern European “color revolutions” which gained attention in the Western media through the 2000s (see Manning 2007 for comparison with Georgia). A few of the more cosmopolitan of my informants suggested such interpretations themselves. However, Sarajevo protests never attained a color, nor did they even aspire towards ushering in a fundamental “regime change.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, rather than appealing to some revolutionary rhetoric, or universalizing language of rights, the narrative of the protests by and large remained limited to the specificities of the local political situation.<sup>16</sup> The widespread conviction that the Bosnian context is both unique and uniquely dysfunctional further fueled such ambivalence about broader implications of the mobilization.<sup>17</sup>

In Bosnia proper, the major accomplishment of citizens’ upheaval was its successful reframing of the dominant terms of the political conversation. The protesters challenged the existing logic about politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in several ways. While focusing on the crumbling justice system and irresponsibility of appointed officials, they diagnosed this moment of “crisis” in terms of a different set of political criteria, which had little to do with matters of constitutional reform, disagreements between nationalist elites or identity politics. In the eyes of

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<sup>14</sup> The following chapter explores these problems in greater detail.

<sup>15</sup> In 2006, four activists (unofficially, affiliated with DOSTA) “attacked” the building housing the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Presidency by splashing the entrance and the policemen guarding it with paint. This incident, was partly inspired by events in Ukraine, bore the name of a “colorful revolution” (šarena revolucija). Despite the attempt to frame this event in terms of broader, regional transformations, the media and the public never saw it as anything more than a childish stunt.

<sup>16</sup> Owing to the timing of the mobilization, which took place a few years before the major uprisings in the Middle East and Occupy Wall Street (whose strategies in particular have many parallels with Sarajevo), Bosnian protesters obviously could not make appeal to some larger global narrative. As I discussed in the introduction, while these mobilizations were taking place in other parts of the world, Bosnia was mostly quiet. The only exception are the 2012 Banja Luka protests over the shady privatization of a city park, which was turned into construction site by a developer close to the Bosnian Serb nationalist leadership. But that protest too had more in common with the one in Sarajevo, than with the Arab Spring or OWS.

<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 2008, Open Society Fund gathered the leaders of these protests in a weekend-long meeting in a mountain lodge, where political analysts presented a comparative case between Ukraine and Bosnia. While the participants thought the lecture was interesting, during my fieldwork, I never saw them attempt to “implement” lessons learned from the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution.” In my experience, efforts to force such frames upon local activists did not yield any significant response.

Sarajevo protesters, the problem rendered visible by the wave of violent murders and the government's subsequent response to it was a fundamental crisis of political authority (*kriza vlasti*) and the state itself.

The achieved remapping of the political discourse was all the more important because the 2008 violent crimes could have just as easily been folded into narratives of ethnic persecution. To start, victims of both aforementioned murders belonged to "minority" populations in the now predominantly Muslim postwar Sarajevo. As a student of Catholic School Center, a private, denominational high school in Sarajevo, Denis Mrnjavac had been quickly identified as a Croat. His mother's Catholic name and the family's residence in the nearby Croat-dominated town of Kiseljak, further confirmed this presumption. Following the murder, the media house TV NOVA, a Croatian TV station that also emits its signal in Sarajevo, launched a controversial and highly criticized news story, spinning Mrnjavac's murder as a hate crime against a Croat. The protesters, police investigators, the management of the Catholic School Center and the family itself categorically rejected these implications, forcing TV Nova to issue an apology. To make matters worse, NOVA missed the fact Denis's late father was a Bosniak, which made him a "child of mixed marriage", a category of special moral and political significance in postwar Bosnia, ravaged by nationalist conflicts.

The rejection of nationalist frame paved the way for Mrnjavac's murder to be understood in different light. Moreover, while no one denied that the murdered Ljubica Spasojević was a Serb, the media paid relatively little attention to the fact her attacker was a Roma. Angered Sarajevans with whom I spoke "simply" called Robert M. a delinquent and a monster, rarely if ever mobilizing the available ethnic stereotypes about the Roma population. Nevertheless, as was the case with the accused in the Mrnjavac case, the public had little sympathy for the predicaments and needs of underage boys living in social and economic marginality. This fact alone illuminates a key aspect of these protests that remained almost entirely unacknowledged.

As I show in the following sections, class rather than ethnicity played the key role in mobilizations around Mrnjavac's murder. Because the victim was an exemplary student, a handsome kid and the only child of a widowed mother, his murder struck a cord with middle class parents,<sup>18</sup> who were already deeply worried about the future of their children in the moment defined by a chronic and multifaceted social, political and economic insecurity. These middle class anxieties translated into the very composition of the body of protesters that took to the streets. Although the socioeconomic backgrounds of the protestors varied (there were seniors, single mothers, youth, workers whose firms had gone bankrupt, etc), the most vocal participants and the majority of emerging leaders belonged to a disappearing urban middle class, with secure jobs and significant amounts of social and cultural capital. In short, the people on the streets did not necessarily belong to the dispossessed lumpenproletariat stripped naked in the process of postwar primitive accumulation. Many of them had never done a political act of such order before that moment. How did people to whom the postwar period seemed kinder than to many others emerge as the most vocal advocates of reorganization of political structures?

### *A future in crisis: Youth violence, middle class security and good governance*

The Bosniak nationalist parties in the city governments tried to discredit the protestors by

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<sup>18</sup> Relatedly, the fact Denis was a child from a respectable, middle class family which had previously seen tragedy, made a lot of difference in the way his murder was picked up both by the media and by the protesting public, the majority of which was also middle class, professional and as my informants put it "situated."

claiming they were the agents of the Opposition, members of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) or even paid spies of the International Community. Since the protest drew larger than usual number of non-Bosniaks, ethnically mixed families, middle class professionals and Sarajevo natives (as opposed to newly arrived refugees from other parts of Bosnia who are thought to be more conservative), a significant sector of the protestors was probably more sympathetic to the SDP. But most people who came out to the streets were not party loyalists and had never before engaged in any type of political activism. Their focus on rising violent crime and deteriorating security indicated that their demands could not simply be reduced to the preference for the antinationalist Opposition. Instead, they called attention to the new kind of perceived precariousness in everyday life, which could not just be brushed aside as the unfortunate effect of the difficult economic situation. They saw insecurity as a product of the failures of postwar state to guarantee public safety and provide a context in which gruesome murders would not go unpunished. Special accent was placed on the disappearance of the disciplinary institutions, and the effect that this had on “decent, ordinary citizens.”

The preoccupation of citizens with issues of public safety suggests declining confidence in the ability of Bosnian state to retain its monopoly on the use of violence, to prevent or regulate crime. In such a frame, what seems to be at stake is a particular sort of a crisis of sovereignty, which is haunted by the memory of conditions under which this new state was born. In addition to recruiting ordinary civilians, Bosniak nationalist leadership mobilized during the war the help of street gangs, petty criminals and serious mafia to help with the defense of the besieged city. This “devil’s bargain” brought into close proximity and near symbiotic relationship this postwar political oligarchy and the criminal underground, which on occasion shows its ugly face through different scandals. The public’s impression of the compromised security situation corresponds to this anxiety about corruption, criminality and violence as being embedded in the very foundations of the new postwar state.

In other words, the fact that protesters singled out safety over many other possible sources of complaint, though unanticipated is not incidental. The majority of Bosnians tolerated their socioeconomic struggles because the end of the war gave birth to a new logic of political docility predicated on that familiar phrase: “it’s all good while no one is shooting.” Withdrawal and absenteeism was further fueled both by a recognized absence of a viable alternative and the desire to preserve one’s health and sanity from being colonized by two decades political upheaval and hopelessness. But when children and the elderly became victims of terrible crimes, this logic lost much of its potency, especially among the anxious parents who were among the first to join the protests. Twelve years’ worth of grievances came to surface once the threat to bodily safety materialized in the figure of the unscrupulous young delinquent whose imagined moral deficit was only proportional to his economic marginality and chaotic socialization amidst widespread institutional and social ruin. In this case, the problem was not simply the degradation of the state’s monopoly over violence. Equally pressing were the anxieties about the capacity of this state to provide necessary modes of discipline, in the dual Foucaultian sense: as pedagogy and as punishment.

The moving target of this failed (post)disciplinary state was youth. The events of February 2008 undoubtedly framed youth as the population that best exemplified widespread anxieties about the uncertain national future. They also produced it anew as a category that was at once a potential source of risk, but also in dire need of guidance and investment. Unsurprisingly, many young people participated in the protests, despite the fact that as group, they had long become synonymous with voter absenteeism and disillusionment with postwar



nationalist politics. This time, they marched side by side with adults, sometimes carrying banners with cynical messages such as “We don’t need anything, everything has already been promised to us.” During one of the protests, two young boys were photographed carrying a sign “Tito did not hide from youth”; a message that was probably composed by their parents, since their own lived experience did not include the late Yugoslav president.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, despite the generational difference, the contrast between “then” and “now” could still be mobilized as a powerful mode of critique. Simply put, the postwar politicians could not measure up to the, if not quite “radiant past,” then at least one that was more livable.

Youth represented the segment of the population that during socialism had been the target significant political and social intervention by the Yugoslav state.<sup>20</sup> Young people’s political and moral subjectivities were molded from the early stages of their life, through membership in societies such as Young Pioneers, Tito’s Youth (Omladinci), and volunteer activities such as Youth Work Actions and Brigades.<sup>21</sup> During late socialism, the public view of youth became darker and more sinister, as experts and government officials worried that the rise of unemployment (i.e. Zukin 1975; Woodward 1995), drug addiction, social “delinquency,” nationalism, political radicalism and violent crime were disproportionately affecting this segment of population. Throughout 1980s, Yugoslav sociologists produced a series of studies and polemics, contributing to the growing genre of “society in crisis” literature (discussed in Ch 1). They decried the problem of “youth delinquency” and other signs of social and moral disintegration of their country.<sup>22</sup> Several studies done in this period inquired into the rising significance of nationalism among youth, and particularly later, into links between certain forms of peacetime violence and dissent (such as football fan clubs with their hooligans) and paramilitary mobilizations in Serbia especially (see Čović 1999).

Violence perpetrated against and by youth—i.e. by the eighteen-year-olds enlisted in armies and paramilitaries—became an ordinary part of the wartime landscape. The 1992-1995 siege loomed large in the social imaginary, but so did the memories of prewar, socialist era which most associated with safety and security. To highlight this contrast, my interlocutors frequently cited this line: “Before the war, you could fall asleep on a park bench and no one would touch you.”

Yet a few were quite explicit in claiming that back then, the police was strong and the “criminals” were afraid, because—as a divorced teacher in her mid forties told me—they could “capture and beat suspects at will”. She saw the new, reformed police as weak, in part due to liberal laws and human rights protections imposed by the IC, which were more in accordance

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<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to track down the creators of this particular sign. When I enquired with the general secretary of the Josip Broz Tito Memorial Society in Sarajevo, Dževad Kapetanović, he told me that the group did take part in the protests and that they did create a number of signs, but he could not remember this one in particular.

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, in the postwar process of reconstruction and reconciliation, youth was also singled out as a target for various sorts of social, cultural and political interventions by international governing institutions and NGOs. Yet, because these bodies were concentrated in cities, access to opportunities, education, and skill acquisition was never evenly distributed. In fact, much of this activism reinforced privilege and marginalization. It also created a whole new NGO elite of pseudo-cosmopolitan youth, whose idioms, ideas, tastes and ambitions stood in stark contrast with the rest of society. For one, this youth “bought into” the discourse on democratization in a way that often proved alienating to their surroundings. Their modes of discourse and political views were seen as naïve, dismembered from the context and simply ventriloquizing idioms already circulated by the International Community. However, not all youth found such rationalizations of politics compelling. For a summary of contradictions produced by international efforts at school reintegration, see Hromadžić 2008.

<sup>21</sup> I discuss Work Actions in some detail in the following chapter. To mark the significance of youth in the Yugoslav socialist society, May 25<sup>th</sup>, the official birthday of Marshal Tito, was renamed into “Day of Youth”, a national holiday whose key ceremonial aspect was the delivery of the Tito’s baton after a relay which passed through all the republics of Yugoslavia.

<sup>22</sup> See in particular *Deca Krize* (Children of Crisis) by Mihailović from 1990, and *Mladi i Nacionalizam* (Youth and Nationalism) by Raičević and Davidović from 1984.

with the EU standards but made criminals insolent and unrelenting.<sup>23</sup> When in the summer of 2009, a series of new murders (including that of Amar Mistrić, which I discuss in the thesis's conclusion) inspired an entire neighborhood to block a major intersection in the city, one female resident in her sixties lamented on state TV: "Oh the beautiful (police) baton of Tito."<sup>24</sup> These women, who felt particularly vulnerable as potential victims, prioritized the strong state over the more "humane" and rights oriented procedural norms imposed by the EU on Bosnia.

In other words, while most protestors raised questions about the ability of the postwar state to effectively work with and sanction underage offenders, some among them promoted illiberal and draconian measures to improve public safety.<sup>25</sup> Such sentiments were often expressed on online discussion forums and in comments on web news portals, where participants offered radical solutions to the problem of "youth delinquency." Undoubtedly, these arguments revealed the underbelly of the clever and playful messages sent by other protestors, mainly urban liberals, professionals and intellectuals, who offered their demands in the language of rights, fiscal responsibility, "accountability" and transparency. They also illuminated the plain fact that among those protesting could be found people of all ideological and political shades, who defied facile categorizations into progressive or conservative. What line of reasoning did then manage to hold them together?

### *The state and its "postpresence"*

While the protests were taking place, analysts paid surprisingly little attention the fact issues such as public safety and youth delinquency already had a complex socialist history. The cacophony of voices gathered in the streets of Sarajevo and the many differences in the positions of protestors vis-à-vis prospective policies of regulation and sanction did not simply reflect some sort of postwar ideological disorientation. They mirrored the continuous blend of reformist and reactionary tendencies in the manner in which Yugoslav state approached its own politics of care. Yugoslav project created a hegemonic framework that managed to harness both liberal and conservative aims, blending enlightenment rhetoric with a hard punitive fist of the state (also see Jović 2001). The postpresence of this state (Dunn 2008) haunts contemporary arguments about juvenile crime, and proper forms of youth sanction and rehabilitation. It also, as I show more robustly in the next chapter, informs ongoing thinking about authoritative modalities of activist work and citizen engagement more broadly.

As I have argued in the introduction, the blind spot of many policy analyses of postwar "democratization" in Bosnia, is their treatment of the political-historical context, in particular the legacies of the socialist era. Most frequently, analysts simply ignore the ramifications of the socialist experience, or merely rely on vague presumptions about its "totalitarian" character.

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<sup>23</sup> This argument was often paired with rumors that seasoned criminals were hiring underage novices to do their dirty work, because they were counting on the loopholes created by institutional weaknesses and lack of proper juvenile prisons to make such acts unpunishable.

<sup>24</sup> Following the protests in 2008, two other series of mobilizations around issues of public safety happened in Bosnia, the first being this week of rage in August 2009, when an execution style murder of a young waiter by a couple of drunk thugs caused his whole neighborhood to come out to the street and block the intersection. The third moment took place a short while ago in the northern Bosnian city of Tuzla, which was shaken up by a series of violent crimes including a murder and a rape. This constitutes a significant and recent pattern that offers a telling insight into transformations of politics in postwar Bosnia.

<sup>25</sup> After a new wave of murders in the city in 2009, Citizen Action caused a scandal by sarcastically proposing the founding of citizen vigilantism as an answer to the problem of eroding security. Some members of the public read it as a literal call, without recognizing the irony.



Accordingly, Bosnians' purported "apathy" or reluctance to engage in direct forms of civic participation, is explained away as a holdover from the communist era, where political engagement is understood to have been discouraged (e.g. Howard 2009, for critique see Sampson 2002, 2003; and Greenberg 2009).<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, postwar international intervention remains more or less accepted as some kind benign, beneficial and ideological neutral project, aimed at helping move Bosnia forward (see Janson 2006). This dynamic is one of the key reasons why there is so little sustained discussion on the postsocialist "transition" in postwar Bosnia. The reforms which elsewhere took place after 1989, in Bosnia were part and parcel of post-Dayton reforms that were directly supervised by the International Community and its many governing bodies, including the OHR and OSCE. These unprecedented efforts toward creating what Kim Coles has called "democracy by design" (2007) amount to much more than what Hayden (2007) has criticized as "forcing antagonistic ethnic groups to live side by side"—they entail an attempt at normalization of an array of political practices and forms whose value, effects and uses are anything but ideologically neutral.

The "Strategy for Prevention and Sanction of Juvenile Offenders" offers important clues as to the sorts of transformations underway in postwar Bosnia. The Strategy was created and passed under the pressures of the OSCE, the international overseeing agency in charge of civilian aspects of implementation of the Dayton Accords. Following Western European models, it proposes the separation of juvenile from criminal courts, and offers a far more decentralized model of regulation and sanction for juvenile offenders. As expected, the Strategy counts on the involvement of non-governmental sector and non-state service providers, at times mobilizing developmentalist tropes in order to make the transition to a new model appear natural and unavoidable. While this Strategy is comprehensive in theory, it also turns the blind eye to conditions under which prosecutors at various levels of government work. Aside from the problem of non-existent or defunct institutions, like disciplinary centers and juvenile jails, prosecutors also cannot implement many of the Strategy's recommendation because qualified and certified judges and prosecutors specialized in juvenile justice do not yet exist. This type of overhaul requires a major investment of resources and a comprehensive, long-term education of experts, neither of which is simple to organize in an administration already plagued by disorganization and fragmentation. When local officials fail to deliver, their lack of success reflects not only their own incompetence but also the fact that the structural conditions for the enforcement of new laws do not exist. Such discordance between expectations and conditions under which they must be realized will be familiar to other scholars of former Socialist world. Bosnian institutions are being measured against norms and standards that guarantee and perhaps anticipate their failure (see also Dunn 2005).

The general public in Bosnia, despite being skeptical about the promises of the postwar reconstruction and the international involvement more broadly, is also rarely made privy to such technical obstacles or unrealistic expectations for reform. Furthermore, while most Bosnians recognize that the end of war also ushered in the arrival of capitalism and market economy, hardly anyone speaks of these ongoing reforms as neoliberal. The strange absence of such lines of criticism compounds the sense of Bosnia's exceptionalism; the country's historical trajectory, in my experience, is rarely narrated through the larger historical shifts that swept up the rest of

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<sup>26</sup> As I discuss in earlier, such an opinion seems paradoxical, given the fact socialist societies including Federal Yugoslavia promoted compulsory politicization and mandated various forms of political participation (about which I will have more to say in the following chapter). Therefore, when such sweeping statements are made, they make visible the fact that within the domain of foreign intervention certain models of participation are seen as preferable, more democratic and more authentic than others.

the world, including not only the fall of socialism, but the demise of the welfare state and rise of austerity and structural adjustment. For Bosnians, the 1990s are primarily associated with war, and the following two decades with the processes of reconstruction. As I discuss in the previous chapter, this fissure usually calls forth a pre- and post- war periodization, and the concomitant language of normality and abnormality (or alternatively absurdity, immorality, decline, etc).

To take the previous chapter's argument further, the recourse to "normality" seems to deliver a profound depoliticization of the current situation, as it fails to recognize or diagnose the ideological facets of postwar insecurity. "Normality" offers little concrete insight into questions of structural reorganization or the politics of redistribution. As Fehervary (2002) and others have shown, the trope of normality indexes aspirations of the Eastern European middle classes, suggesting that it is in some way, inherently conservative. On the other level, the taken-for-granted use of this trope also proves that aspirations shaped by socialist experience remain not only residual but also dominant in the present ways of thinking about proper forms of political organization and engagement. The very invocation of the term "normal," indicates these criteria are not just deeply embedded in social consciousness, but also perceived as moral, just and perhaps also optimal.

This situatedness of political aspirations and attitudes of citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina informs both the actual instances of political mobilization and large-scale disengagement from politics. Furthermore, the lack of popular acceptance of Dayton as a political model for postwar Bosnia, has as much to do with its larger incongruence with such normative visions and forms of regulation desired on the part of the population, as with unrealized nationalist grievances which are usually the focus of political and scholarly analyses. And because Bosnia has been a home to various initiatives for the promotion of democracy, most of which have achieved ambiguous results, it is an inviting place from which to produce what Verdery has coded as the "critique of the actual existing capitalist democracy" (Verdery 1996, Chari & Verdery 2009). To do so, I return to the analysis of the protesters' grievances.

### *Accountability as answerability*

In March 2008, as the chain of protests unraveled, the wide-ranging and sometimes disharmonious demands of the protestors began to consolidate into calls for *odgovornost* [responsibility, accountability]—or holding officials, and sometimes the entire social body, responsible for their (in)action. Sarajevan protestors appeared united in claiming the situation in the local government had become untenable because of the irresponsibility and negligence of people in charge of the daily work of government. While many saw their behavior as a form of ethical failure, some people also stressed that the officials who received—by Bosnian standards exuberant salaries—should step down because they did not do the work for which they were paid.<sup>27</sup> Most of the people with whom I spoke also recognized that some degree of blame ought to be assigned to the IC and the constitutional arrangement created by the Dayton Accords, which set up Bosnia's byzantine structure of governance. Yet despite of this nesting and

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<sup>27</sup> This line of reasoning became even more prevalent in 2009, the year marked by several increases in the compensation of various officers of the legislative and executive branch of the government. These salary increases infuriated the public not only because of the ongoing budget crisis but also because of the unimpressive track record of these bodies and officials employed in them. In 2009, the Federal government, headed by Branković (the subject of the last chapter in the dissertation), had only realized a small fraction of its promised program, even though it managed to create a tremendous deficit that almost lead to the collapse of public financing.

decentralized mode of over-governance, throughout my fieldwork my interlocutors lamented repeatedly that in Bosnia, there was no state, or relatedly no system [*nema sistema*].<sup>28</sup>

This paradox of an absent state and the surplus of governing bodies lies at the heart of everyday frustrations of Bosnians trying to navigate the institutional structures, claim their rights, protect or recover their property, or do simple things like purchase textbooks for their children. Every single one of my key informants had a story about a disorienting and deeply troubling encounter with a postwar bureaucrat who herself did not know the arbitrary rules to which she needed to subject the people standing in line. Such objections about the “lack of system” stemmed out of surviving norms established during socialism, where the state not only acted as an agent of redistribution and provider various kinds of entitlements, but also embodied a form of pastoral power that seeped into every facet of life, providing services, free education and a sense of predictability that was lost after 1992 (for comparative postsocialist perspective see Boyer 2005; Ssoring Cheikov 2003; also Reeves 2010). Even after the war, the state, as an idea and as a material reality that could not be reduced to the questions of national self-determination, remained an object of desire among postwar residents of Bosnia, particularly in the institutionally fragmented Federation.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 30:** Posters announcing a new protest, titled "Citizens defend Sarajevo." Spring 2008. Photo Courtesy of Ervin Berbić

In 2008, it was apparent that this fragmented bureaucratization provided a permanent excuse for the lack of results on behalf of the various agencies, which sometimes could not keep

<sup>28</sup> I do not have the adequate space to properly account for the difference between “state” (*država*) and “system” (*sistem*). The second proposes a broader set of concerns, which involves norms and moral frameworks that guide conduct of individuals.

<sup>29</sup> The situation in the other administrative part of Bosnia, Republika Srpska, is somewhat different, though there too exists a complaint about the infelicitous exercise of sovereign power. To remind the reader: unlike the Federation, the RS is completely centralized, and has no cantonal level of government. This, combined with various strategies employed by the dominant party SNSD and its leader, Milorad Dodik (see Ch 1), gives an impression that matters of governance happen more smoothly there than in the FBiH. SNSD takes pride in appearing to run things more efficiently, since this fact alone endows the RS with the aura of statehood.

track of what exactly were their responsibilities when it came to issue of prevention and sanction of youth crime (cf. Schmitt 1988).<sup>30</sup> One but not the only line of criticism among the protestors congealed over the lack of procedural norms, necessary expertise and professionalism among people whose job descriptions linked them to this problem. In fact, much of the future advocacy and formal activism that grew out of these protests focused precisely on pressuring different governmental agencies to, on the most basic level, do their job. In that sense, the demands for *odgovornost* mirrored discourses that propose accountability as a principle of good governance, a norm optimized for maximum efficiency of rule, which has become associated with the neo-liberal restructuring.

Marilyn Strathern argues that language of accountability invokes "a new league of expectations" merging economic efficiency and good practice (2001). In the arena of contemporary accountability, the financial and moral meet, giving rise to what has, after Starthern, become known as "audit cultures." In this case, audit has become unleashed from its originary arena in accounting and turned into a new tool of institutional discipline. Under these circumstances, the accent is placed on procedural norms: only certain operations count and are deemed as acceptable. The ultimate goal of audit cultures is the creation of an environment where rational principles, formal procedures, and abstract reasoning can lead to the emergence of a new subject, self-reliant, independent, entrepreneurial and responsible. Audit is one but many technologies through which these new subjects learn and come to embody proper mode of conduct. Nonetheless, such use of the notion of accountability poses a radical departure from earlier philosophical discussions on the term, which emphasized the relational nature of action and communication and a sense of moral responsibility (see Austin 1961, Scott and Lyman 1968).

In his studies of primary schooling in socialist China, Andrew Kipnis (2007, 2008) draws on the work of Strathern and other Foucaultian scholars of governmental regulation to argue that audit cultures, and implicitly practices of accountability, are not exclusive to neoliberal regimes. Faced with starkly similar procedures and often redundant, time consuming practices which have come to characterize the neoliberal audit culture, Chinese teachers and social scientists explained these policies in terms of outmoded socialist legacies of bureaucratization or the Party's desire to operationalize Confucian ideals. In his effort to unpack this seeming contradiction, Kipnis arrives to a conclusion that neoliberalism is neither all-encompassing or so distinct of a "regime of truth"—nor that Communist Party practices in China are merely derivative of some Western model. Skeptical of the distinctiveness or even the broad historical significance of neoliberal regimes of regulation, Kipnis instead proposes that what these two paradigms of accountability have in common is their emphasis on scientism and rational modes of accounting. Through doing so, he invites social scientists to pay closer attention to the practices and sociologies of

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<sup>30</sup> Just how badly the various ministries and agencies were doing their job became apparent during one in a series of debates about the implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Sanction of Youth Crime organized by the Center for the Culture of Dialogue. The organizers of this public debate analyzed the written document, on the basis of which they periodically invited different governmental agencies and institutions to report back to the public on the progress of their work on this program. This series of debates was an attempt to actually force the government to be accountable to the public by reporting to it in this public forum. During the last debate, the Federal Ministry of Justice did not even send a representative; instead, they sent a memo, which claimed that one of the rehabilitation centers about which they were asked in the invitation was not in their jurisdiction, but was instead managed by the government of the Canton of Sarajevo. The newly appointed Prime Minister of the Canton, Besim Mehmedić (Silajdžić had by then resigned), who stood on the podium, was caught off guard by this information, claiming that for sure this particular center was in the purview of the Federal government. His secretary then ran up to the podium to give him the actual book of laws, out of which he then read to the entire audience, that yes, indeed, the Federal Ministry of Justice was in charge of management of this particular rehabilitative institution. The members of the audience, and this anthropologist, gasped in disbelief of the fiasco we just witnessed.

governing, rather than abstract, decontextualized understandings of “governmentality.”

Even though Kipnis focuses on an entirely different ethnographic context, his critique of overuse of neoliberalism as a trope in academic research is both persuasive and helpful, for at least two reasons. First, it opens the possibility of thinking in more complex ways about regulatory apparatuses as products of multiple, saturated and overlapping genealogies. Such a reorientation makes a lot of sense in Bosnia, where “neoliberal” reforms are attempted even in the absence of anything resembling a neoliberal, managerial state. The Bosnian postwar state, with its overlapping ethnic sovereignties, fragmented bureaucratic apparatus, inefficient and prolonged procedures, vast social welfare entitlements and reliance on networks of patronage and favor giving, may be an antithesis to the very model envisioned by neoliberal technocrats. To stretch Kipnis’s insight even further, such a multiplicity of practices, rationalities and arrangements is probably neither contradictory nor particular to Bosnia. Secondly and relatedly, Kipnis’s intervention suggests a way outside of a predetermined analysis of “accountability” as always and forever derivative of neoliberal models of responsibility. What would then happen if “accountability” became unhinged from its neoliberal connotations and instead thought as a historically embedded ideal?

In coming out to the streets, Sarajevans did not simply express a desire for efficient procedures and a managerial, neoliberal state. Participants’ attitudes towards bureaucracy appeared more ambivalent: as mentioned, the people with whom I spoke often invoked vague notions of expertise and professionalism in their call for more responsible governance, but more often underlined a sense of a moral crisis illustrative of the overall state of the society. The failures of the local government to address the rising incidences of violent crime among youth did not merely reflect poor institutional performance, but also the pervasive absence of a sense of moral responsibility among the appointed and elected officials. Most of these officials had gotten to their positions not through merit and service, but merely by being members of the right political parties. In fact, the criticism directed at Minister Silajdžić and Mayor Borovac underlined their failures, not only as public servants, but also as human beings.

For example, on the day Mrnjavac died, mayor Borovac was on a diplomatic visit (though really, a shopping spree) in Dubai. Upon her return, she caused public outrage by claiming her role as a mayor was merely symbolic and that she was not in charge of any of the governing agencies that were part of the chain of intervention into problem of youth crime. Instead of recognizing that the public wanted her to take an ethical stance against the violence and the failures of the local government, she instead alienated the protesters further by claiming that there was “no institutional frame for [her] moral resignation.” However, she did not understand that the enraged citizens were not interested in the institutional frames, but rather wanted the mayor to demonstrate a “bare minimum of social decency” that would stem out of a sense of solidarity with the citizens and the Mrnjavac family. In response to Borovac, during the April 6<sup>th</sup> protest,<sup>31</sup> several activists came out and spoke on the makeshift stage, telling the crowd and their mayor: “We, the citizens, are ashamed—how come you aren’t?” Such messages echoed expressions of sorrow and collective responsibility that circulated throughout the protests in a message “Forgive us, Denis.”

In this way, citizens offered a different model of moral responsibility, which they demanded not only of themselves, and their neighbors (particularly those passengers in the train

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<sup>31</sup> This protest took place against the background of an official celebration of the Day of the City, April 6<sup>th</sup>. The protesters gathered in front of the National Theatre, where there was a formal party for the recipients of the annual reward given out by the city government.

who “let” the murder happen), but also of politicians. This expectation was present despite the widespread recognition that people like Borovac and Silajdžić had achieved their elite positions by aligning themselves with the new power holders. Before the war, Borovac was a member of the Communist party and a municipal official in a small town, but in 2008, she was the most powerful woman in the oldest Bosniak nationalist party (SDA), as well as the mayor of a capital city where she could occasionally be visited by the likes of Richard Gere. Despite her apparent opportunism, in postwar Bosnia, like many other appointed officials, she would have disappeared into obscurity, had she not miscalculated the expectations of her constituents.

Those distinct expectations have arisen out of a complex mixture of anger and acceptance of the realities created by the dramatic political and economic restructuring. When I asked Alen, an organizer in his late twenties how he felt about nationalist career politicians like Borovac who had climbed the political and socioeconomic ladder, he quoted a line from a popular song “Who stole, stole!” [*Ko je jamio, jamio*], telling me that the damage which ensued out of the political remapping and appropriation of economic power was irreversible. “Practically, at this point, I don’t even care which (nationalist) party is in power, as long as they are doing their job.” Alen’s position betrayed simultaneously a sense of unexpected pragmatism combined with unapologetic resignation about the injustices that brought about the current state of political affairs.

For these reasons and more, 2008 calls for “accountability” in Sarajevo also differed substantively from familiar discourses and practices of “settling accounts” described and analyzed by John Borneman in his 1997 book on juridical and legal transformations in post 1989 Eastern Europe. Borneman was primarily concerned with the large scale, top down processes of holding communist era officials responsible for injustices, violence and moral failures of the past. By contrast, protesters in Sarajevo demanded *a change of conduct* on behalf of elected and appointed officials, without calling for or attempting to envision a legal procedure for such “accounting.”<sup>32</sup>

Finally, in bringing to the table the failures of postwar politics of care, protesters did not simply assert the superiority of morality over politics. In the context marked by a sea of unprosecuted war crimes, dispossessions and injustices, many of which will never be brought to court, such an argument would be difficult to make. Moreover, one would have to ask all sorts of difficult and potentially politically too costly of questions about the very nature of the new postwar state, and reckon with the world-shattering violence and fundamental injustices on which it was formed. Most of the people involved in the protests were tacitly aware of this. Even though they shared a visceral dislike for nationalist parties and their incompetent cronies, many strategists among the protestors deliberately avoided addressing national level issues, such as the stalled process of constitutional reforms. Forty-three year old Jasmina, about whom I write in the next chapter, told me she was only interested in working on changes in the city of Sarajevo, and possibly also (as she jokingly told me) the slightly larger Canton of Sarajevo. Her claim presented at once a radical refusal of nationalist logic and its tacit acceptance, and as such perhaps best illustrates both the openings and enclosures there protests symbolized.

Yet such partial logics reflected not only the sense of larger political impasse that defines postwar Bosnia, but also the situated nature of ideas that governed citizens’ expectations about the state and the people who composed it. Around the time of the protests, someone left a

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<sup>32</sup> To be clear, the type of settling of accounts that Borneman describes never took place in Bosnia; in place of decommunization and lustration, there is now the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. Gilbert (2007) reports that upon discussing “transitional justice” with one of his informants in Bosnia, this person proclaimed that “Whatever communists might have done, nationalist did much worse.”

graffiti message on a wall in the center of the city that captured well this moral gradient: “Tito stole, but he gave (something) to us. This government steals, but it doesn’t give us anything.” The implication was clear: we, the citizens expect that those in power will try to enrich themselves by taking more than was their share. But we expect that they will have enough sense not to take it all. The punch of the criticism accented not the presence of corruption (which was only to be expected) but the lack of redistribution predicated on a different sense of political rationality and moral responsibility—one that posited also a different sort of normative political subjectivity.

Such standpoints trouble the definitions of accountability reproduced in literature on transitional justice. For example, while Borneman himself remains skeptical about the universal applicability of “rule of law” as elaborated by Habermas (1988), he does assert that principles of responsibility and accountability form a precondition for contemporary democracies (1997, 11). For him, the problem arises when post-1989 Eastern European states assert democratic form prior to the establishment of trust in the procedures and principles of the rule of law. But the notion of “trust” in the system as grounds for political legitimization is something that in and of itself must be questioned.

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How might we then interpret Bosnian protesters’ demands for *odgovornost*? And to what sort of emergent (postsocialist) politics do such demands point? My question here echoes the one posed by Nancy Fraser’s 1997 book *Justice Interruptis*, where she investigates whether a new *postsocialist* politics can be developed out of a reformulated conception of justice—one equally able to address demands for redistribution and recognition. However, my ethnographic investigation suggests that in making sense of this new postsocialist politics in postwar Bosnia, we may also need to transform our understanding of both recognition and redistribution. Can there be a non-liberal form of recognition whose focus is not identity, but a particular relationship of care and responsibility between the state and the citizen? Furthermore, what if redistribution involves not only economic justice, but also “goods” such as security and care, that the state can and has in the past provided?

I ask these questions in an open-ended manner in order to highlight the inadequacy of standard distinction between politics of redistribution and politics of recognition developed by political theorists. How do we understand protest that does not exclusively ask for more equitable distribution of resources or for rights? Ironically, in the course of their revolt, Sarajevans asked for one thing in particular—to be governed. As Plamenko, one of the leaders of the protests (and the focus of my subsequent portrait) said: “it is not my place to think about what the government is doing and whether or not there’s an increase in violent youth crime.” In so saying, Plamenko explicitly rejected the liberal ethos of self-guidance and individual responsibility, pointing out the fact certain forms of governance surpass the purview of individuals or even communalities. Such ambivalence was also pronounced in the stark opposition between the vagueness of the protesters’ ideas about proper procedural norms and their continual recourse to questions of moral responsibility. When protestors attacked Minister Silajdžić and Mayor Borovac, they asked: “Are you ashamed?” This very idea of shame, I want to suggest, holds clues about the effectiveness of Mrnjavac’s murder as a call to action.

In 1919 [1990], Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian theorist of language and sociality, writing about the realm of art and creative engagement proposed a notion of social responsibility that was predicated on guilt, or liability to blame. He called this essential norm answerability, a term

which I'd argue comes much closer than the contemporary English term "accountability" to this situated category *odgovornost*. Although Bakhtin was writing about artists, his ideas are amenable to discussions of any form agency that seeks to transform the world while inhabiting it. To be in a position of authority equals being liable to the social world and the social body; it entails not just electoral, fiscal (or fiduciary) responsibility but also openness to moral scrutiny. This version of responsibility, which highlights the dialogic process of "answering" (as supposed to accounting), presupposes a moral subject vulnerable to shame and accusation, precisely because his very existence depends on the social context which surrounds him.

One may be tempted to see such an emphasis on morality as politically naïve or even "immature." In Bosnia, protests such as these often earn the label of being "pre-political," a criticism I take on in the very conclusion of this dissertation. Yet they help sustain vocabularies, practices and visions of an ethical project that –without yet knowing it—rivals the neoliberal paradigm of responsibility, which reduces *odgovornost* to exact procedures and demands of fiscal accountability. And in the spirit of Bakhtin, it is only right to recognize that any future mass politics in postwar Bosnia will be predicated upon the chains of experiences and imaginations pasts—it is for this reason we ought to look more carefully when situated grievances become translated into the idioms central to the project of democracy promotion. For good government and good life are ideals have alternative histories and other moral geographies.

## Part II: the People

In this next part of the chapter, I attempt a different kind of an analysis of the protests, one that zooms in on a few of their select participants, in order to ask: How did a random murder of a 17-year-old boy compel people who had never done any kind of activist work to come out to the streets? To answer this question, I turn to the personal accounts of Plamenko<sup>33</sup> and "Iris," two middle-aged participants of the protests, and the ways they explained why they took part in the demonstrations. I dwell especially on the recurrent metaphors of bodily disintegration and visceral angst, which they offered in place of a cogent ideological narrative that would cast their motivations in a recognizably political light. Such metaphors offer a potent site for thinking about the role of historical experience, especially experiences of violence, in the processes of formation of political subjects. Drawing on the interviews I collected while working among the protesters, I will show that the response to the boy's murder had only been partly provoked by the event itself. Since many of the protesters were themselves parents, who are already facing profound challenges of raising a new generation whose political and economic prospects remain uncertain, the violence provoked not only fears about their own children's future or safety, but more abstract anxieties about the shape of things to come. Simultaneously, Mrnjavac's slaying also made painful again the memories of wartime violence and the broken promise of postwar return to normal life. However, for many Sarajevans, the tragic event also carved out the space of possibility in which the trauma of war could in fact be experienced and redirected.<sup>34</sup> In the

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<sup>33</sup> Chapter 1 begins with Plamenko's "dispatch" from Sarajevo from spring of 2012; the material presented here marks an epoch of his intense, yet gradually decreasing participation in political activities.

<sup>34</sup> One might pause here to wonder about the contrast between the paralyzing effects of images of Srebrenica massacres and commemorations, and the visceral response and mobilizing effects produced by the news of a boy's killing.



course of this process, and as I demonstrate through the stories of Iris and Plamenko, previously unimaginable forms of political action became a necessary answer.

*A claim of the past on the future (that cannot be settled cheaply<sup>35</sup>)*

Among the first to join the 2008 protests were numerous parents of Mrnjavac's generational peers who saw the violence as a sign that the future had been forfeited. In their eyes, this lost future had an avatar: the figure of the young, abandoned and unredeemable delinquent. The emergence of the violent underage criminal—at once an abject matter expelled from the social body and a carcass of dreams of postwar progress—did not simply symbolize the postwar crisis. The murders committed by juvenile offenders that winter recalled the arbitrariness of wartime violence and proved that the peace had been a poisoned gift that kept on giving.

Sarajevans have lived with this knowledge about Dayton brokered peace for years—as I have already proposed, the US-drafted agreement may have ended the war, but it also created a state with multiple and overlapping sovereignties, characterized by a paradoxical non-presence. Absence of a coherent future oriented vision, or rather, the overwhelming presence of its many irreconcilable versions, made this non-presence of the state painfully apparent. To repeat, the problem was not simply the degradation of the state's monopoly over violence. Equally pressing were the anxieties about the capacity of this Frankensteinian postwar state to mold and if need be, control the social body, and the individuals that composed it.

The collapse of the juvenile system, namely the disintegration of the network of disciplinary and resocialization centers, offered one piece of proof that the state no longer existed in crucial and very material ways. But for many Sarajevans, the very character of new postwar institutions put both the existence and the effectiveness of the new "State" in question. Could a new state create the grounds for sustainable forms of social reproduction? Many feared that the postwar setup made this goal untenable. As offered in the previous chapter, at the end of the war, in many places throughout the country, ethnically divided, poorly regulated educational systems began to mold a new generation of pupils for whom the exclusive and segregated institutions and forms of life had become both normal and the norm. Corrupt and defunct system of higher education, which treated universities as permanent incubators for the labor force that the meek job markets could not absorb, contributed to catastrophic state of spirit among the country's youth.

Older generation often condemned young people for their alleged indifference, laziness and lack of moral characters. I heard the most dramatic such condemnation in a casual conversation with forty-six year old Asim. He went as far as to tell me that the entire generation of youth that came of age during the war and at its end needed to be (quite literally) killed off because they were "good for nothing." Such rhetoric was not only frightening but also contrasted sharply with the ethics of self-sacrifice that often informs the discourse on parenting and the change of generations.

Moreover, the disavowal of young generations stood out against the teleological narratives of socialism that identified youth as the bearer of revolution and progress. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx put forth a materialist conception of history that insisted on the necessity of breaking with the past so as to enable a radically new future. "Tradition of the dead generations," he insists, "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the

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<sup>35</sup> See Thesis no. 2 in "On the Concept of History" by Walter Benjamin.

living” (Marx 1978 [1892], 595). Such faith in historical tradition, in Marx’s view, made French peasants vulnerable and attached to the Bonaparte dynasty, which represented not glory but demagoguery and bondage. In place of attachments to yesterday, and the farce of forced repetitions, Marx demands a revolution that would constitute a true emancipation from the shackles of capitalism and the specters of the past.<sup>36</sup> Some fifty years later, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin will criticize this utopian vision of history by insisting on the fact the past lays a claim on the present and the future. In Benjamin’s version of historical materialism, a political awakening goes hand in hand with the redemption of the past. Moreover, Benjamin suggests that historical consciousness is a necessary aspect of revolutionary politics, since historical index of objects and images makes them readable in a determinate historical situation or a moment of crisis (Santer 2005, 88). In contrast to Marx, who insists on the necessity of a new beginning, Benjamin’s writing places the accent on the responsibility of the present generation to uphold the memory of those already gone.<sup>37</sup>

While Marx’s faith in the possibility of a new beginning rests on a type of a utopianism long made impossible in postwar Bosnia, Benjamin’s intervention still leaves open the question of how to think about not only the abandonment of young generations for whom there is no future, but the shocking insistence on the need for a “final solution” that would permanently remove them from the face of the Earth. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this morbid call is the notion that these particular generations of youth, unlike others, contain an irreparable manufacturing fault due to their misfortune of having been raised in the context of war. Nevertheless, the brutality of such condemnations makes apparent that they originate in the adults’ feelings of shame and guilt: the responsibility for the political catastrophe belongs not to youth but to those whose actions lead to it.<sup>38</sup> In that sense, the underage delinquent is not merely a person, a representative of a social class or of a cohort: he is a specter that serves as a terrifying reminder of the future gambled away by his parents.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this kind of blame game had the potential to cut both ways. Some of the younger participants in the protests expressed their frustrations and their sense of resentment toward their parents, who wanted to prevent their participation in the demonstrations. For example, “Muamer” was irritated because his parents worried that he was exposing himself to risk by having become something of a spokesperson for one of the organizations involved in the mobilizations. But Muamer did not want to hear about risks, at least not anymore. “While they

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<sup>36</sup> Derrida will criticize Marx’s utopianism by theorizing that far from being archaic and useless, the figure of the specter is central to Marx’s philosophy of history. Among other things, Derrida argues that for Marx, the Revolution is itself a spectral figure, simultaneously oriented towards the past and the future. Communism is a not yet that must announce a future presence.

<sup>37</sup> This is what—in my reading—Benjamin means by invoking the phrase “weak messianic power” (Thesis no.2), speaking of a form of prophetic vision belonging to each generation, which simultaneously contains an echo, or an address from the past. Notably, De Certeau makes a similar point in his magnificent essay “The Historiographical Operation” where he describes the writing of history as a form of communion with the dead.

<sup>38</sup> Fifty-five year old Ivana, the mother of one of the protesters, invoked this lost relationship to the future when she told me: “You know, my generation’s relationship to the future was carefree (bezbrizna). My father raised us to believe that with honest, hard work, our achievement and security were guaranteed. My daughter and you, you will never have that relationship to the future.” To me, the most interesting aspect of this diagnosis lies with the fact Ivana does not encode her past sense of carefree futurity in terms of false consciousness, naiveté or disappointment. By contrast, her guilt about lost possibilities suffered by her daughter (and me!) takes center stage.

<sup>39</sup> A reminder: this new young delinquent is the second coming of the old one, which first became manifest in the 1980s, as the Yugoslav state was rapidly coming apart at its seams. That original figure, I would argue, was the response to the horrifying recognition of the late socialist intelligencia, that the Yugoslav socialist revolution had been betrayed and that its utopian promises were about to unravel in the worst imaginable ways. Perhaps one could think of the original delinquent as a figure bound to prophesy, and the new one as functioning in terms of a trace that comes from the past but travels in the direction of the future.

ate bananas” he told me, comically describing the careless nature of his parents’ lives during the 1980s, “someone else was preparing for war...and now, they want me to sit and be quiet? Why didn’t they do something so that I would have a future? Why didn’t they leave Bosnia, why did not they do at least that?!”

Indeed, questions of parental responsibility and intergenerational betrayal loomed large over the protests. But the figure of the young delinquent, and the responsibility for his demise and failure, were thought to lie not only with the dysfunctional families from which such children are assumed to hail, but to the entire society and the absent, dysfunctional postwar state, which is incapable of producing a vision of and the institutional context in which some more desirable future could be realized. In such a moment of crisis, parental responsibility becomes a dramatic sort of a predicament, taking on a new sense of urgency. How does one raise a child in the context where the world that once existed no longer is, yet where one lives surrendered by the memory and the traces of its existence and demise? As I show in the section that follows, parental anxieties arising out of such questions and predicaments figured prominently in the stories of protestors, many of who are raising adolescent children in a country whose own future remains marked by uncertainty.

#### *About Iris: Or mothers and son’s without futures*

“What do you want to know about the protests?” was the question posed to me by Iris as she, a fellow protester by the name of Jasmina, and I sat in the beer garden of a café restaurant in Dobrinja, a project neighborhood on the periphery of Sarajevo. We sat across the street from a newly opened Slovenian shopping center chain, drinking white wine spritzer, while cigarette smoke hovered above us on a fresh September night. I sensed Iris trusted me more than Jasmina, though not completely; this was to be expected since I had shown up mere two months earlier with all sorts of questions about the spring protests. Looking for a way to begin a conversation, I asked Iris how and why she decided to join the demonstrations. I confess that I hoped that she’d offer an elaborate justification that would help me come up with a reasoned narrative about the events I was desperate to reconstruct in light of my own “late arrival” to the scene. At that time, I was still concerned about the fact I could not always find a common thread among the people with whom I spoke. But Iris found a different way to tell me about the protests. Inhaling the cigarette smoke, she began:

That night when they announced on the news that Denis died, and when they showed the crying face of his mother...(motions with her hand) my *insides turned upside down* [*sve mi se prevrnulo*]. It was just too much. At that moment, I knew I had to do something, but I didn't know what. And so, when they announced the protests would be taking place a few days later, I simply went. I was just waiting, looking for a way to react.

As Iris described becoming physically unwell following the news of the murder, her voice began to shake and her eyes welled up with tears. She stared me as if to insist that this answer contained all that I needed to know about her participation in the protests. Although I did not yet know what to make of her reaction, or of the explanation she offered, I sensed that probing for more answers, for some kind of an elaboration, would have been deeply inappropriate. In fact, Iris had just given me the most helpful answer to my question—but it would take some time before I could actually hear her words.

More than any other protester I interviewed, and perhaps in light of her own predicaments as a divorced mother of two sons, Iris had been preoccupied with the singularity and the details of Mrnjavac's murder. She was also the parent who identified the most with Ana Mrnjavac, Denis's mother. Over the course of my fieldwork, Iris actively pursued a friendship with Ana Mrnjavac, insisting that Denis's mother become a member of the board of the newly founded organizations, which the protesters created after the demonstrations. Like Ana, Iris was carrying the torch to the fading fantasy of eternal Bosnian multiculturalism; living and working in the increasingly ethnically homogenous postwar Sarajevo as a non-Muslim. Both Ana and Iris were raising children and caring for aging parents alone—Ana lost her husband in a tragic work accident and Iris divorced hers. But the contrast between them was also quite stark. Ana was college educated and held a secure, high-paying job in one of the government ministries. Iris, by contrast, was a former secretary, who found a job as a housekeeper and receptionist in one of the government agencies.

Iris's modest salary, working a job below her skill-level, education and ability, supported her two sons and her aging mother. Iris's husband was no longer in the picture: a demobilized soldier in the Bosnian Army, he turned to alcohol at the end of the war. He put Iris through so much heartache that she asked him to leave. She remains unpersuaded by his efforts to rekindle their relationship. In 2009, her youngest son almost gave her an ulcer when he failed to get into a four-year high school that would offer him the possibility of going to college someday. She mobilized all of her social capital in sight—courting his grade-school teachers, friends and acquaintances who worked in the sector of education and her numerous other “connections”, to help get him on the list for the second round of high school entrance exams. Eventually, he got into a better school, only to flunk 14 out of 15 subjects in his first year, because he did not do any studying at all. Iris attended parent-teacher conferences and tried all means of subtle and overt persuasion. She was grateful for the fact her son did not have any other problems, and was otherwise well behaved, courteous and kind. But her heart broke when he told her he did not see the point of studying when he would not have a future since he lived in a country where no one accomplished anything through honesty or hard work. “What am I supposed to say to that?” she asked.

Faced with such problems at home, Iris found both a distraction and a sense of purpose in her new love of political activism. While street protests lasted, she took on different sorts of responsibilities that helped her rise above the anonymous masses as one of the citizen-organizers. Then, when a portion of the citizen-activists decided to found a registered organization, she became one of the most active members, taking on many administrative duties including the production of the organization's newsletter. When the Police of Republika Srpska arrested thirteen members of the organization during an unannounced protest near a UN military base in October 2009,<sup>40</sup> Iris was the only woman among them. Upon realizing that the police was about to take away the men (mostly young men who participated in the parodic intervention), she took on the role of an enraged mother, sat in the police van at her own initiative, and volunteered to be arrested.<sup>41</sup> Her attachments to the organization were profound; she became very close to another single mother in the organization, Jasmina, as well as a number of others. As I demonstrate in the

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<sup>40</sup> I analyze these events in Chapter 6.

<sup>41</sup> The rest of the women, myself included, fled the scene, first by running through the corn fields and then by catching a ride with one very confused cab driver. Iris told us later that she put herself on the line because she could not bear the thought that the guys (and one middle aged man who also participated in the activist intervention) would be beaten by the police. She, like the majority of other participants in the “action”, had left work on her lunch break and could not come back. As a result, she was reprimanded, and almost lost her job.

following chapter, the strength of such bonds and the recognition of a shared project held this multigenerational, multiethnic and politically heterogeneous group of people together.

But like all families, this one eventually imploded. The organization had been having problems since its inception; many of its members feared that formal registration procedures destroyed the activist spirit and energy that brought these people together in the first place. By the time 2010 rolled around, disagreements over the direction of the organization and handling of procedures made animosities run high. Younger members pushed several middle aged activists out of the organization, including Iris. The betrayal injured Iris profoundly; her insides turned upside down, again. After weeks of taking tranquilizers, she resigned and vowed to abandon political activism all together. “I cannot fit it under my skin anymore” [*Ne može više pod kožu stat*], she said. Ironically, the same sensations in the body that got her out on “the street” pushed her to opt out of her long-standing political engagements. It is as if these bodily disruptions communicated a signal that the space of possibility offered by the unexpected uprising in which she participated had been violently foreclosed.

### *What remains unsaid: the story of Plamenko*

Iris’s experience of internal implosion and dissolution helped her, at least for a period of time, to channel her parental fears into activist work. But she was by no means alone in experiencing this kind of *signifying stress* (Santer 2005). Nor was she the only one among my informants who tied her activism to her role as a parent. Although not all protesters with whom I spoke focused so intently on the significance of Mrnjavac’s slaying, throughout my research, essentially all middle-aged activists in the group spoke of their children and predicaments of parenting brought on by the postwar hopelessness, insecurity and social disintegration. Maja, another divorced, single mother in her mid-forties, complained to me that her efforts as a parent were always being compromised by the environment in which her son was growing up. Acknowledging that children are raised by communities and not simply by families, she confessed she was losing the battle over her son’s values, sensibilities and taste in music.<sup>42</sup> Other mothers had much worse problems: another protester had a daughter with a heroin addiction, which was bringing emotional and financial ruin upon their single-parent, working class household. A father of a thirteen-year-old girl joined the organization after she was held at knifepoint in front of their apartment door.<sup>43</sup> Such shared experiences of grief, trauma and uncertainty, held the organization together even at times when profound political disagreements almost lead to fist fights during weekly meetings. But no story paralleled that of Plamenko.

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<sup>42</sup> Although the issue of music genres may seem trivial, it is in fact profound. For decades, preferences in music served to place people ideologically, aesthetically and politically in former Yugoslavia. Inclinations towards urban genres such as rock, punk or even hip-hop were seen as preferable to listening of folk and turbo-folk. The latter denote provinciality, backwardness and lack of sophistication (in this sense “folk” music does not have the same connotation in Bosnia as in the US; moreover, this particular genre is to be distinguished from neotraditional *sevdah* and other contemporary recuperations of tradition which belong to the realm of world music industry). The incredible postwar increase in popularity of turbo folk serves as one of the measures of degeneration of youth—and is one of the most frequent complaints among urban Sarajevans. Listening to such genres no longer carry the same kind of stigma as before.

<sup>43</sup> This particular story is quite complex and important, and will perhaps be elaborated in a different chapter. The father of the attacked girl used to work as one of the main financial auditors for one of the government agencies. When his team produced a report, which exposed fraud and corruption in this agency, he received numerous threats and was asked to step down. To this day, he believes the attack on his child was precipitated by this situation at his work.

In early July 2008, on the sixth-month anniversary of Mrnjavac's murder, a group of about thirty regular participants in the spring protests came together at the tram stop near which the stabbing happened. While several people laid flowers and light candles, someone in the group posted a black and white printout of a photograph featuring a smiling face of Denis. At once intimate and public, the gathering was the first occasion since the last protest in early May where this group of people had come together under the gaze of media. Freshly arrived "in the field," and eager to learn about the protests, I stood there, wondering if it would be possible to enter this strangely intimate space. Meanwhile, journalists flocked around a charismatic man in his mid-forties, who had clearly taken on the role of the *porte parole*. As I drew closer, I too recognized this man from an article about the protests that came out in a local political magazine a few months prior. Feeling encouraged, I approached him with a request for an interview. Over the subsequent three and a half years, through a series of long and rich conversations over coffee, beer and tea, Plamenko would become a friend and one of my key ethnographic interlocutors.

Plamenko was born in Sarajevo the late 1960s, to a Muslim father and a Serb mother, both of who lost their parents in the carnage of WWII. On one occasion, he told me that this fact in retrospect made his life easier, because this absence of family connections secured his complete dedication to the Yugoslav socialist project. In his case, he insisted, there were no elders who could provide alternative narratives to the official history of the war, and in that way introduce doubt into his young life. By contrast, his parents were so dedicated to the state that helped rear them and to the Yugoslav ideals, that they gave their only son a name that embodied an unmistakable socialist élan (plamen = flame). Plamenko's only surviving grandparent, his maternal grandmother, profoundly influenced him, developing his love of language and wordplay, and involving him in the Mensa society. This membership in Mensa, which he actively pursued even as an adult, endowed Plamenko with a sense of exuberant self-confidence and occasionally also masculine bravado. Despite his vast acumen of different kinds of knowledge, Plamenko had never went to college, and attended, partly at a whim of his father, a trade school in place of gymnasium. In the late 1980s, after serving his compulsory military service in Belgrade, in the elite guard of Yugoslav National Army, he came back to Sarajevo to work in the burgeoning field of computer technologies. Meanwhile, he socialized with the city's cultural elite among which he came of age, and pursued a record deal for an album for his up-and-coming rock band. Just as they were about to sign a recording contract, the war broke out.

In the early days of mayhem, Plamenko found himself picking fights with looters of stores and supermarkets, because, as he told me, he could not come to terms with this potent sign that the social order was actually breaking down. Realizing the fruitlessness of his original compulsion, he decided to enlist as a volunteer for the Bosnian Army, whose officer he would remain until the bitter end. During the war, Plamenko was wounded two times: the second time, he narrowly escaped death. The ligaments in one of his legs were so severely torn that the doctors feared his ability to walk had been permanently compromised. Through sheer power of will, Plamenko learned to manage his wounds, finding that his hobby as a cyclist made for an excellent form of physical therapy.

This therapy was much needed: the end of war brought many changes in Plamenko's life, including marriage and children. A self-described "perfect, command-obeying soldier," he came to a quick organization that "peace" posited a different set of rules. On many occasions, he spoke of his struggles to accept and come to terms with the fact that, as he put it, "no one owned him anything." He was tremendously frustrated with the state of veterans' associations in

Bosnia, filled with former and pretend- fighters, who demanded a life-long paycheck from the state for past services rendered.

Plamenko himself found lucrative employment with the American embassy in Sarajevo—a job that made possible his secure upper middle class lifestyle, fed his love of music and instruments, but also became the origin of stories that Plamenko was in fact, an American spy.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as I describe elsewhere, Plamenko’s frustrations with the veterans associations weren’t based on an ideological opposition to entitlements or commitment to the (American) ideals of self-reliance, but the fact these organizations were prostituting themselves with the leading nationalist parties and settling for crumbs. Following the end of war, Plamenko also dabbled in politics by pursuing a short-lived engagement in the Social-Democratic Party. But because he deeply disliked the postwar cadres and the direction of the social democrats, he decided to stay out. In the meantime, he pursued his other creative aspirations, becoming one of the most prominent and widely followed writers in the growing circle of Bosnian bloggers.

The murder of Denis Mrnjavac violently awoke his desire to take part in some form of political action. He came out to the street on the very first day, and then used one of his blogs as a public forum to incite protest and political debate. In the interview for the news magazine,<sup>45</sup> describing his reasons for participating in the protests, Plamenko admitted:

"I went out of fear. Important things have happened in this city during my life and I participated in them. After all that, I became afraid that I would be remembered as a part of the generation that is identified by the phrase: keep quiet, all is good until they begin shooting [*šuti, dobro je dok se ne puca*]. The day Denis died, a switch went off [*ja sam bukvalno prevrn'o*]<sup>46</sup>. After the war, I had the parking break on. In February, I decided my fear had come to an end" (Plamenko in Mujkić 2008).

The type of fear Plamenko described had nothing to do with anxieties about potential retribution or intimidation by nationalist parties, or some other agent of the underground loyal to them. The fear about which he spoke belonged to an entirely different register. During one of our conversations in the summer of 2008, Plamenko described to me his return home from work

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<sup>44</sup> Though a friend, this anthropologist was never convinced by the job description Plamenko offered as a response to my repeated inquiries. He claims his job is to manage the transport and import of supplies and personal items, which American soldiers and diplomats bring to Bosnia. Some of my other informants, notably those that had other friends employed at the Embassy, insisted that Plamenko actual job description remained ambiguous and unknown to his Bosnian work colleagues. I suspect his job involves some kind of military intelligence, but I am less sure whether he took part in the protests at the initiative of his employers. Nevertheless, his high level of exposure in the media leads me to believe the Embassy was very supportive of his actions and presence in the media limelight (by contrast, another informant, working as a financial analyst at UNDP, was asked to refrain from public appearances and protests, because the organization did not want to appear impartial). Be that as it may, I do not think I will ever be able to fully grasp the nature of Plamenko’s involvement in the protests or of his commitment to our long-standing conversation. Over time, I have ironically grown less dismissive of various conspiracy theories that circulate among Bosnian activists, who are convinced that saboteurs and paid agents abound among them. Ethnographers have often been accused (rightfully or wrongly) of being such agents, but I know of few anthropologists that openly discuss similar uncertainties about their own key ethnographic interlocutors. Unsurprisingly, the knife cuts both ways. Despite my long-term presence, strong bonds to individual activists and willingness to participate (even sometimes initiate) activist interventions, I also still remain a mild object of suspicion. What is more, due to my own work at gathering “intelligence” as an ethnographer (some of which indeed has been funded by the US Dept. of State through the IREX program), my informants sometimes endearingly refer to me as “our own spy.” Of course, the will to accuse someone of being a spy is very much a legacy of socialism, and a predicament familiar to anthropologists of (formerly) socialist countries.

<sup>45</sup> At the time, this media appearance had been engineered as an attempt by the protesters to put a name and a face on an amorphous mass of people who had come together under the simple name of “Citizens of Sarajevo.”

<sup>46</sup> This phrase is difficult to translate. Literally, it means “I turned over” but it could also be translated as something akin to: “my insides became my outsides.”

on the day that Denis Mrnjavac passed. The news pushed him into hours-long paralysis out of which he was catapulted by the sound of fireworks. The fireworks had been arranged in honor of the opening of the annual festival Sarajevo Winter, traditionally held in February to commemorate the 1984 Olympics. Describing his outrage at the level of "alienation" [*otuđenje*] in Bosnian society, and at the people who did not see it fit to postpone the celebration because a child had just died in the most gruesome of ways, he exclaimed: "Right there, I imploded<sup>47</sup>" [*Ja sam tu puk'o*]. Using a ubiquitous, common language phrase, he described to me a type of somatic transformation mimicking a psychological breakdown so powerful, it is thoroughly felt in and through the body. Bosnians spoke about this "internal bursting" or "implosion" as a stage following a long-term sedimentation of frustration, anger and resentment. Eventually, a person can "burst" in this way because he or she can no longer take in his surroundings or suffer his predicaments.

Plamenko's account reminds of the one offered by Iris; both place their emphasis not on some coherent political program, but on the forceful, visceral response to the murder itself. To make sense of these bodily sensations and their mobilizing impact, I briefly turn to the writings of Eric Santer, a theorist influenced by psychoanalysis and Jewish mysticism of Rosenzweig and Benjamin. In a chapter entitled "Miracles Happened" published as a three way conversation on the political theology of *the Neighbor*, Santer develops a notion of *signifying stress*, in which past, largely unassimilated memories began to announce themselves through the body demanding an often unspecified answer. To illustrate his point, Santer turns to Christa Wolf's novel *A Model Childhood*, where forgotten memory of failed interventions on behalf of victims of Nazi regime begins to manifest itself among the main characters through various forms of bodily ailment and anxiety.

Such a conceptualization of "forgotten failures to act" resonates with Plamenko's own confessions in his interview in the news magazine. During our first conversation, he spent a great deal of time tying the stabbing of Mrnjavac to largely forgotten past murders of other young men, notably the killing of 24-year-old Dino Drnda in 2006, as well as the more recent gruesome burning of Ljubica Spasojević a few weeks before the Mrnjavac killing. What is more, Plamenko spoke of encountering the mother and sister of Dino Drnda (who was fatally stabbed by a nephew of major Bosniak nationalist politician while on his way to take out the trash) at the winter protests. The two of them silently carried the photograph of the deceased Drnda when Plamenko spotted them in the mass of protesters. In recanting the moment, he told me that his chest tightened up from sorrow and embarrassment. Eventually, when someone brought out a megaphone and the protesters began to take turns speaking, Plamenko attempted to carve out a space for the Drnda tragedy in the midst of Mrnjavac protests, by offering the two women the chance to speak (a chance which they both politely declined, also out of embarrassment).

The consciousness of the figural relationships among these various events did not belong to Plamenko alone. This row of murders took such prominent place in the shared imaginary precisely because these singular events always referred back to a not-yet mourned collective trauma of war and the concomitant disappointments of postwar reconstruction. Senseless murders of young men and women and gruesome killings committed by underage offenders horrified Sarajevans precisely because they took place in a moment where everyone expected that such frequent instances of arbitrary violence had come to an end. To use Santer's language, the murders communicated the memory of this historical experience in a form of "a peculiar ex-

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<sup>47</sup> Alternatively, "I exploded (or blew apart) on the inside."



*citation* transmitted by the past” (86), which arrived in a form of a traumatic event that summoned forth the unexpected wave of citizen protests.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, the newly retemporalized historical experience of war helped redirect this ex-citation into a response oriented not towards the past but towards the future. But as Santer warns, what characterizes this call, or rather what becomes apparent in the course of its transmission, is the fact the subject himself is estranged from this past.

In conversations with Plamenko, the past always arrived in fragments of different stories, about the Olympics, his childhood, war battles and wounds. He selected these stories for their performative value, frequently calibrated to meet the expectations of the ethnographer. But when Plamenko begins to speak about his own responsibilities as a parent of a thirteen-year-old boy, his narratives take on a different tone all together. Plamenko’s commitment to the parenting of his child borders on obsession; he invests all of his time, energy and resources in raising his son and improving his own parental pedagogies. While he claims that his wife deals with their son’s academic success, he sees himself as in charge of socialization, hobbies (including his son’s very serious musical training as a saxophone player) and ethnical molding of his person. The father-son pair spends countless hours discussing their relationship and listening to sophisticated music, attending jazz concerts and even political protests. In that sense, Plamenko is not simply an ambitious father, but someone whose sense of self is continually reconfigured in relation to his adolescent son. Parenting, for Plamenko, is a life project.

Yet amidst these frequent conversations about parenting, one thing has always remained unspoken, even though Plamenko has on a few occasions hinted at the passing of a world-shattering tragedy in his life. Despite our friendship and numerous, long conversations, he himself has never told me about the fact he had in the past lost another child. Knowledge of these events came to me in a form of a question, posed to me by another mutual friend and protester, Ivan, who heard the rumors about this tragedy from an acquaintance. To this day, neither Ivan nor I know the details about these events—it is only through the disconnected fragments of Plamenko’s biography that I managed to construct a hazy and relative chronology. Yet I do not know whether this child was a boy or a girl, whether he or she was older or younger than his son, and under what circumstances or where this tragedy happened.

Plamenko’s inability to talk about his loss and to bring it to the forefront of his political activism helps illuminate the fact that phantoms of the past—engendered by wartime and postwar tragedies alike—make demands on the subject in a powerful but enigmatic way. In his discussion of modern miracles as forms of (post)secular prophecy, Santer suggests that the subject’s relationship to past is “permeated by inconsistency and incompleteness...[and] haunted by a lack ...to which we are in some fashion answerable” (86). This past experience—that in a sense has not *yet been*, remains in a spectral, protocosmic, yet constitutive aspect of one’s subjectivity. Plamenko’s case presents the most extreme version of the ways in which the past, marked by a myriad of tragedies and traumas, remains a ghostly non-presence, just like the very state born out of war and ethnic cleansing. While the unresolved consequences of this war remain omnipresent, all attempts to emplot these experiences into one coherent, systematic narrative fall short of capturing the variety of incommensurable experiences. This relationship to the wartime history may best be described as one of estrangement [*otudjenje*]. Thirty two year old Azra who came of age in besieged Sarajevo once asked me: “Did it all really happen? I

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<sup>48</sup> Ironically, as Sarajevans protested in response to deterioration of public safety and the growing problem of violent youth crime, the city administration was realizing the planned construction of a monument for the children killed during the siege. Yet no politician or political party managed to effectively harness such fears and turn them into a political platform or program.

sometimes wonder whether I remember it all wrong. It's like these memories are not my own." This alienation from one's own memory, has nothing to do with naïve forgiveness or forgetting; I would argue it is in fact necessitated by the enormousness and proximity of trauma, and perpetuated by the curious state of suspension in a political framework that is a product of war and not its remedy.

Perhaps it should then come as no surprise that the political projects emerging out of such experience of historical time, fissured by lack, take forms of cacophonous screams, which citizen activists only retrospectively try to develop into a set of recognizable demands. The most powerful of them had been given in the form of a question to the absent state and its insolent administration:<sup>49</sup> "Are you not ashamed? We, the citizens are ashamed. How come you are not?" This invocation of shame offers important clues to the model of ethnical responsibility on which these protests were based.<sup>50</sup> This shame has a synchronicity: it is simultaneously a communion with the dead and attempt to redeem the future.

### *Afterwardsness: or on the discordance between emotions and events*

In conclusion, I return again to my original question. Under what conditions could a deadly altercation among teenage boys become a spark for mobilization of citizens otherwise disinterested in activism or protest? What gave the event of Mrnjavac's murder such force? In this chapter, I have argued that the effectiveness of this tragic event as a political catalyst derived not only out of the unique circumstances in which it took place, including a very specific instance of governmental negligence and the insolent behavior of politicians who became the protesters' targets. Mrnjavac's murder violently recalled the arbitrariness of wartime violence and provided material proof that the future, which everyone had been waiting for had been sacrificed to the unnamable, unbearable debt of the past. The material trace of this debt was nothing other than the body of young delinquent, a failed product of wartime pedagogies, ready to set old women on fire or kill its peers on trams and cafes.<sup>51</sup> The arrival of this figure helped reconfigure the relationship to ongoing political "crisis" and its historical roots, while also creating an opening for new kinds of intervention on behalf of those willing to listen.

A similar kind of reconfiguration of memory takes central stage in Laplanche's writing on the concept of afterwardsness (*Nachträglichkeit*) of trauma. Seeking to recuperate Freud's abandoned theory of seduction, Laplanche poses a series of questions about the central role of repetition in the experience of traumatic events. He suggests that traumatic events often become

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<sup>49</sup> On one level, the idea that state agencies and institutions could have prevented the murder of Denis Mrnjavac is probably far fetched. But the real scandal erupted when the public learned that the cantonal government had been forced (by international overseeing agencies) to pass a comprehensive strategy for prevention and sanction of juvenile crime in 2006. The existence of this strategy proved that experts and the government were well aware of the level of disintegration of the juvenile justice system. But the real shock took place when it became known that for two whole years, the administration did nothing to enforce this document (even though under law, they were obliged to come up with a plan of implementation). Citizens became further enraged when the cabinet of the cantonal government in Sarajevo tried to retroactively pass the action plan. While this meeting was happening, a mass of protesters gathered in front of the government building and subsequently started to throw rocks at the windows. I write about these events in detail in the other text.

<sup>50</sup> In fact, "odgovornost" (responsibility/accountability/answerability), eventually became the central (if somewhat elusive) demand of the protestors who were responding to criticisms that theirs was not a real politics because it had not clear focus. Political analysts quickly translated these calls to responsibility into desires for accountability and rule of law. One of things I am trying to do in the direct analysis of the protests is propose a different idiom—that of answerability, which is based on liability to blame and capacity to feel shame.

<sup>51</sup> In my view, the media and the public at large demonstrated very little interest or curiosity about the boys who attacked Mrnjavac, or the boy who set Spasojević on fire. It was as if no one was interested in them as actual persons—they were simply static versions of a decontextualized archetype. On the other hand, as a victim, Mrnjavac could be made an icon, and a martyr.

experienced not in the course of their actual happening, but in their aftermath, the second event which bears the mark of the original injury. The concept of afterwardsness relates to the centrality of retroactive attribution, and to the status of traces of past which make demands on the subject in an enigmatic way. This theory of trauma suggests a different way of interpreting the metaphors and the intensity of visceral responses described by my informants, which I have described, following Santer as a form of signifying stress.

In the context of Bosnia's prolonged political deadlock, which has turned the current postwar era into an endless space of deferral, such experiences of retroactive recognition of past traumas take on unique forms (which tellingly become manifest through sensations of bodily disintegration and implosion). However, the most significant aspect of this process of deferred recognition is the way suspension of historical time ushered in by Dayton paradoxically provides unexpected openings for active redemption of the past and the future through political action. The deeply personal traumas I described here left behind many traces, which became activated when the mysterious symptoms in the body brought to (a temporary) end paralysis and complacency. In that sense, the murder of Denis Mrnjavac did not merely interrupt Plamenko's everyday, but it also made recognizable the ongoing existential crisis, which demanded a new course of action. Granted, such emergent forms of politics do not always come together into a transparent program—but they illuminate the cracks where certain kinds of political potential are stored.

At the end, I should say that I do not want to posit historical experience nor individual traumas as some kind of a repository, an archive that can be reactivated whenever a political struggle is ongoing. If there is one thing to learn from the parents who took part in the protests in Sarajevo, it is that traces of the past have an agency of their own that does not always fit rational, human made categories (including those that produce criteria about what counts as real politics and what does not). The lived memories inhabit the present, yet they do so in partial, self-contradicting and at times terrifying ways. People like Plamenko and Iris managed to recognize an address of this spectral past as a message that demanded “an awakening to a new kind of answerability in ethical and political life” (88). In the process, they changed little else but their neighborly relations—acquiring profound friendships leading to equally profound betrayals. In the following chapter, I turn to their struggles and attempts to carve out an original and effective model of activist work.

## CH 5: FOOL'S ERRAND: POLITICAL ACTION AS ETHICAL PRACTICE

On September 3, 2008, after a relatively quiet summer following Sarajevo's spring of discontent, a dozen former protesters met in the restaurant "Marijin Dvor" near the eponymous downtown tram station. A gathering place equally welcoming of professors, artists, government officials and bohemians, the restaurant seemed a strangely appropriate venue for such a meeting. On a quiet fall afternoon, it offered enough space and seclusion for what was to be the reunion of a loose collective that first came together during the February protests. Amidst its dirty orange walls and white tablecloths, the small group exchanged reserved hellos; despite having taken part in the same protests, many of those attending were still strangers to each other.

The leader of the initiative, forty-five-year old Dinko,<sup>1</sup> an unemployed economist dabbling in small business entrepreneurship, had convened this meeting in the hope of gathering support for the founding of a citizens association [*udruženje građana*],<sup>2</sup> which would continue the work began by the protests. He had sent the call for the meeting through the discussion forum of Sarajevo-X, the website protesters used as the initial line of communication, inviting everyone and anyone to join his initiative. A serious, earnest and articulate man, who had quickly become one of the protesters' leaders, Dinko believed that the demonstrations created a sense of momentum, which had to be harnessed into a more formal, more organized and recognizable form. During this meeting, the first in a series of several such gatherings, he emphasized that if the former protesters truly wanted a more responsible and accountable government, they too would need to become an official, legal actor. "So far," he argued, "we have been working extra-legally [*van zakona*]." By protesting as an informal mass, in Dinko's view, the citizens had sought to achieve their goals through unofficial channels, thereby also undermining the very legal and political system that they sought to strengthen. Meanwhile, Dinko argued, many other forms of intervention, including advocacy, lobbying, even lawsuits against negligent state agencies, had remained inaccessible. In order to walk the talk, *Građani Sarajeva*—"Citizens of Sarajevo," needed their own organization.

Although this idea had many supporters among the people who came to the restaurant, not everyone shared Dinko's view of the group's future. To some, the idea to form a civic association seemed contrary to the spirit of the spring protests, whose participants were proud of their informal, horizontal and at times innovative approach to grassroots politics. Next to their recent organizing experience, a registered organization sounded like a conventional, rigid and "old-fashioned" design. Consequently, even though everyone agreed that the protesters needed a new direction and a new framework for action, consensus was hard to come by in this dynamic group of enthusiasts. And their disagreements followed no proscribed pattern, either. Among those present were many older and middle-aged participants of the protest, who may have been presumed to desire more structure and organization. But this cohort of professionals—accountants, lawyers, administrative workers and artists—also held opposing views on this new dilemma of "formalization." Conversely, the formalization initiative attracted the attention of

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, quotation marks around someone's name (appearing on the first mention only) indicate the use of a pseudonym. Names that appear without quotation mark are real, and have been revealed on agreement, and/or because they are too difficult to hide, given that many of the people I have written about here are public figures. When information revealed seemed potentially compromising, I did not name my interlocutors directly.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will use the terms "citizens association" (*Udruženje građana*) interchangeably with nongovernmental organization or NGO. As I subsequently explain, "*udruženje građana*" is a generic term that predates the war and indicates the formal, legal status of organizations founded around certain shared interests, political or not. In principle, most NGOs in Bosnia are registered as citizens' associations. A smaller portion of donor established groups, such as for example the Open Society Fund, are registered as foundations.

some younger protesters. Participating in the meeting were also twenty something “Senada,” a computer programmer and university student, Sanin, a high school student and a member of the youth wing of the Social Democratic Party and “Katarina,” the moderator of Sarajevo-X discussion forums in her early forties whose politics was more socially liberal than that of most others. The heterogeneous group nevertheless represented a cross section of the protestors: it was multi-generational, multiethnic, and socio-economically diverse. As was the case with the rest of “Građani,” this small sample shared neither a political vision nor a preference for a method but had been united by outrage, dissatisfaction and desire for change. In the subsequent weeks, in similar restaurants and cafes across town, these individuals and about dozen more of former protesters would debate the question of registration and the future prospects of a withering political mobilization.

Among those who took part in the discussions, many were downright ambivalent about the next steps. A few—feeling particularly energized by their participation in the protest—would have probably supported any initiative that promised to bring the protesters together again. Others yet put their convictions on the line. Some critics pointed out that by formally registering, *Građani* would effectively become an “NVO”<sup>3</sup> and thereby transform from a grassroots effort into a particularly problematic sort of an organization, destined to scramble for grants and political favors. These dissenters underlined the miserable failures of the internationally sponsored project of building *civilno društvo* [civil society] which had sprung into being thousands of such “non-governmental organizations,” most of which were either defunct or fronts for profit driven or ethnonationalist interests. Given the fact that the “Citizens” sought from the beginning to differentiate themselves from this internationally engineered, ineffective and frequently ridiculed sector, registration carried the risk of the group losing its fragile and hard-earned legitimacy and authenticity. Even when Dinko and his supporters insisted that this new organization would do things differently, internal opposition remained skeptical that an official registration would do the group much good.

In parallel, some of the younger leaders and activists in charge of creative work [*kreativci*], emphasized that the informality of the protests had been an advantage, because it allowed for a more flexible and in some cases more effective organization. Such lack of formal status, they argued, had also attracted people who normally would not get involved in the work of associations, because they did not consider themselves to be the overly “political” or especially activist. Informality also offered a compromise to those that, on the account of late-socialist disillusionments and pitfalls of post-1990 “democratization,” had become reluctant to participate in any formal political initiatives. Yet this sector of the population, who saw involvement in politics as morally compromising, futile or even embarrassing, also contained a large pool of potential supporters and allies. Furthermore, advocates of informality underlined the virtues of the lack of legal status: the same afforded theoretical opportunities to pursue experimental and guerilla tactics that a number of activists preferred. Finally, several people raised objections to Dinko’s plan to use the original phrase “Citizens of Sarajevo” as the future name of the organization, arguing that theirs was only one initiative that emerged out of the protests and that they had no right to use the brand in this way.

After much deliberation and a series of pledges and promises, this group of about 25-30 protesters decided to register a citizens’ association under the name “Citizen Action” [*Akcija građana*]. This new organization, it was agreed, would leave space open for a variety of methods and political orientations, including legalist tools and experimental strategies. Those affiliated

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<sup>3</sup> NVO is the acronym for *nevladina organizacija*, the equivalent of a non-governmental organization (NGO).

with the organization but ultimately uninterested in becoming its formal members would nevertheless be welcome to initiate campaigns and join in as volunteers. Such a pluralist solution, however, did not resolve the central problem at the heart of this ongoing political transformation: the opposing pull of the desire for a manageable, authoritative and organized format for activist work (such as that of a civic association or even an NGO) and the political sensibilities, garnished out of historical experience, that saw rejection of that very form as a precondition for a different, more sincere, and possibly more appropriate type of political action.

This chapter recounts and places into a broader political context the reluctant, tension-ridden founding of Citizen Action [Udruženje građana “Akcija građana”] and examines the subsequent challenges this new organization faced as it sought to transform itself from a loose informal network into a formal civic association. These challenges, in some ways specific to the organization but also illustrative of a particular political moment, once again bring to light the questions that have been framing this dissertation. How does one, under what terms and to what end, engage in political activism in a situation marked by an acute and widespread skepticism about transformative capacities of all participation in politics? What methods, tools, and formats of political action are suitable during a moment of impasse, amidst a simultaneously inert and disarrayed political structure that makes all intervention seem futile? What kinds of political sensibilities, long standing understandings and values affect activists’ horizons of expectations and the actual practices of activist labor? What is the status of socialist history in contemporary forms of civic engagement in postwar Bosnia? And what is the relationship between this particular grassroots effort and the internationally sponsored programs of democracy promotion and civil society building?

In an effort to address some of these questions, this chapter extends the work done by the four that preceded it, all of which have grappled with the complex, unfinished and uncertain nature of a political field that emerged in the aftermath of the fall of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian war and the ongoing process of postwar reconstruction. Building upon the preceding analysis of the “spring of discontent” out of which this new organization grew, it simultaneously sets the stage for the following, sixth and last chapter, which looks explicitly at the continuing role of informality and experimentation in Citizen Action’s work. As a whole, these three chapters dedicated to Sarajevo activists also reveal the tensions between the myopic diagnoses of postwar political apathy and the various forms of political participation that do take place within and without the democratization paradigm.

Specifically in this chapter, my aim is to problematize the frequently encountered view that the *problem* of political disengagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been inherited from the socialist period. Through the case of Citizen Action, I show how notions about law, proper forms of citizen engagement, and ethics of participation come to be constituted through a complex renegotiation of political memory, socialist era vocabularies and paradigms made available by postwar democratic reform. I show how in the context of profound delegitimization of the internationally sponsored democratization, historically authoritative formats of political action and their associated conceptions of participation, become resuscitated as a mode of critique and an alternative form of engagement. In the second place, I posit that reimagining activism as a form of ethical practice, rather than merely a political program, helps an activity often described to me as “foolish” and “useless” generate value even when activists’ labors fail to make a significant imprint on their society.

*In Search of Form: From Informal Protests to a Civic Association*

The argument that took place in the fall of 2008 between future members and affiliates of Citizen Action coincided with the moment of an internal impasse. Following a dynamic winter and early spring, by late summer their protesting activities had completely ceased. After an emotional and relatively well-attended April 6 protest, the last public gathering on May 9 bore the mark of a small street performance. Sensing that the energy that held the protests together had been spent, organizers spent the summer off the streets, while privately engaging in debate and discussion. Dinko's idea—to register a formal NGO—appealed to some of the former protesters because of its promise to introduce more structure into what had always felt like a series of chaotic improvisations. Activists were tired, and now that the enthusiasm of their fellow Sarajevans had dwindled, genuinely concerned that they could no longer continue to work in the same manner [*Ne može više ovako*]. By that time, many of the ardent former protesters had given up and withdrew; however, a critical mass of people still existed that was not yet ready to do the same.

This group, despite their many differences, shared a conviction that the spring mobilization had something unique and valuable to offer, because it had been a genuine, sincere and “apolitical” expression of citizens’ alarm and discontent. In describing their experience of the mobilization in those terms, the former protesters underlined the “spontaneous” nature of the uprising and its autonomy from properly political forces, such as political parties, international overseeing institutions and even the non-governmental sector. To be apolitical in this context signaled lack of partisanship, rather than lack of political conviction or absence of a political agenda. Such a rhetorical designation carried important ethical weight in the space overdetermined by *political* (read: ethnonationalist) competition, vested interests, and internationally designed agendas.

What's more, protesters in Sarajevo were well aware of and experiencing themselves the mushrooming disenchantment, even disgust with existing civic and activist organizations, including the many NGOs that formed in Bosnia at the end of the war. As I discuss in more detail in the following section, by mid-2000s, many of these civil society groups had become an object of public scorn and ridicule. Today, activists in the sector are often described as “merchants of fog” (*prodavači magle*)—paper pushers and ventriloquists of empty phrases, whose own subsidized, privileged and ostensibly cosmopolitan existence bears no connection to the rest of the society. Persuaded by and sharing in such critiques, a fledging new generation of activists wished to differentiate itself from its predecessors.

This desire for a political alternative untainted by the influence of political parties or foreign donors, could not always be sustained in reality. To start, opposition parties such as the Social Democrats and liberal Naša Stranka (then a brand new kid on the block), had a clear interest in supporting the 2008 protests, not in the least because of the municipal elections scheduled for the October 5 of the same year. What's more, most protesters preferred these “antinationalist” and “civic” parties (*građanske stranke*) to their nationalist competition. Additionally, some protesters were openly participating in party-affiliated organizations such as Forum mladih SDP, the Social Democratic Youth Wing. A few others had become involved with Naša Stranka (or had flirted with the idea of doing so). These links notwithstanding, the agenda set by the protests also helped these parties gain control of the municipal government and the mayoral seat during the October local elections.

But the extent of mutual entanglement between the protesters, and particularly the future Citizen Action, and the “Opposition” was always difficult to gauge. These groups seemed to share a set of political values and affinities, but explicit cooperation was to my knowledge never on the table. Rumors circulated that SDP and Naša Stranka actively courted certain protesters who they wanted to add to their ranks; several activists reported receiving shady offers of employment and professional positions (see especially the case of Dejan in the following chapter). But there were also important tensions and disagreements. Months after Citizen Action registered, it issued a public statement criticizing yet another omission of the government agencies, explicitly blaming the Social Democrats, who had by then taken over certain key political positions. Soon after this incident, the organization’s president heard through the grapevine that “the party” did not appreciate such behavior, especially because they were “all on the same side.” This made Citizen Action all the more determined to call SDP cadres to responsibility.

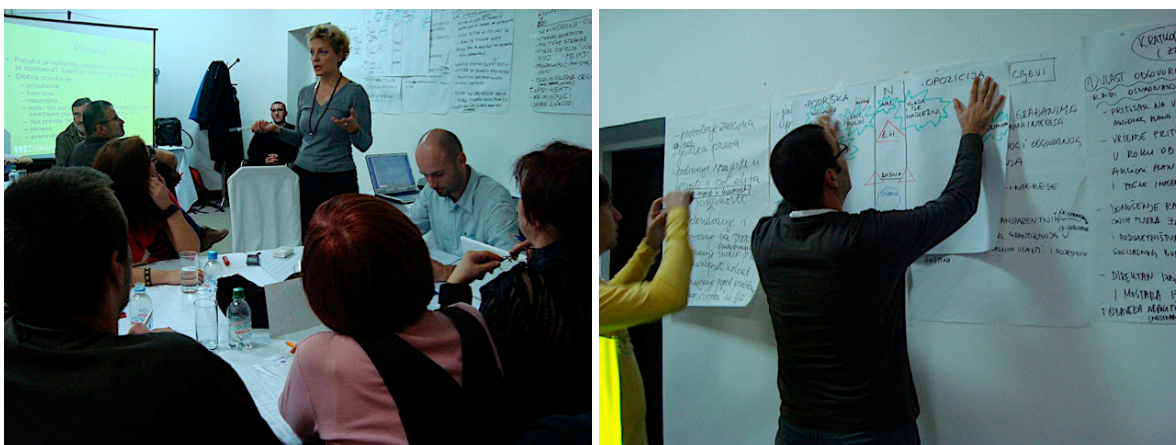
The relationship of the protesters and future members of Citizen Action with the formal civil society was also complicated. Despite the frequent claims of the “Citizens” that their protests had been a spontaneous and autonomous mobilization of the people, the reality was that the new amateur activists were from the beginning being helped by established non-governmental organizations. Open Society Fund, the local spin-off of Soroš Foundation, over the course of the few months channeled substantive funds into the logistical support of the protests, including allegedly hiring for a small hourly wage people that would sit at the tables and gather signatures for the petitions demanding officials’ resignation. There were also whispered allegations that some of this money ended up with another organization and in private coffers, but despite my repeated inquiries, my knowledge of these events remained muddy and such claims unsubstantiated.

Reactions of the established NGO sector towards the protesters were mixed. Some organizations thought the protests were too disorganized and too unarticulated to be effective. Other NGO workers, who had first knowledge of the fights that went on behind the scenes, criticized the combative fractionalism of the “Citizens.” But those that mattered the most—donors, or more specifically, the key donor agency—considered *Gradani* the first sign of hope for Bosnia. The willingness of Open Society Fund to streamline funds into an informal group testified of their infatuation with the personalities and the energy of the protesters. Early on, the leadership of the foundation decided to take the budding activists under their wing, support them, train them and enable them to demand the kind of democratic change that it had been pursuing in the region for at least fifteen years.

First on the agenda was networking. In early fall of 2008, several of representatives of “Citizens” were invited to take part in a workshop in one of the hotel lodges on Bjelašnica mountain, near the Olympic ski trails. There, they were presented with a series of materials that included “lessons” from the Ukrainian Orange Revolution and suggestions on how to broaden their goals to include some of the overarching agendas of the International Community, including the stalled process of EU Accession reforms. Then, activists were invited to take part in a new civil society coalition properly titled “Odgovornost” which was supposed to unite a complex of friendly associations in a common agenda towards achieving greater governmental “accountability.” After the first meeting of this stillborn coalition, where the established NGOs bickered over the definition of goals and aims of the coalition, the director of the foundation, Dobrila Govedarica, decided to take a different approach and support only the members of emergent Citizen Action.



A few weeks later, as former protesters struggled to write up and ratify their charter and get their paperwork in order, Open Society Fund organized a workshop, designed to teach them how to write a project proposal so that they could—quite literally—give them money to continue their activism in a new form. During this training, performed by the externally hired, but wonderfully lucid and levelheaded, Sevima Sali-Terzić, much emphasis was placed on helping those present re-imagine activist politics not as a matter of “revolution on the streets,” but a range of other processes and tasks, which included such “serious” practices as lobbying and advocacy. For two weekends, sitting in the windowless room of a downtown hotel, a group of about thirty former protesters, listened and took notes on how to define short and long-term goals, how to identify, locate and map out stakeholders, and most importantly, narrow down its aspirations into an actionable program. Against their vague desires to be “active” activists, and work on “awakening civic consciousness” [*buđenje građanske svijesti*], protesters were encouraged to think about their aims and goals strategically and realistically.



**Figure 31:** On the left, protesters listen on and take notes as Sali-Terzić speaks. Sarajevo, October, 2009.

**Figure 32:** On the right, activists map out the stakeholders. Sarajevo, October 2009.

Reactions of the activists were mixed. Plamenko, who had arrived to the meeting hoping for something other than a training seminar, left almost immediately, declaring he was not interested in NGO-type activism. Others, such as Mirza, the painter about whom I write in the next chapter, almost followed suit, but decided to stay. He changed his mind halfway through the workshop, declaring that to break things down in this way was “not just bullshit.” Generally speaking, activists who had already decided to pursue registration of a civic association were more receptive to these lessons, and took them in with great seriousness. But doubts persisted too. As we walked out, “Elma,” one of the younger activists in her early 30s, confided in me that she was not sure whether this group would be able to implement these strategies. “All of this is really great—but I have a feeling we will go back to doing things our own way, reactively, at the last minute [*kampanjski*] and without much planning or thinking.”

Over the next few years, Elma’s words would haunt my ethnographic observations, as the organization struggled to find its path between a reactive, immediate model of activism and a more careful, professionalized and planned agenda. Following the training, Elma and a few other jargon-savvy activists sat down and wrote a proposal for which Open Society Fund soon awarded them a start-up grant. The proposal focused explicitly on the promotion of better

governance in relation to prevention and sanction of juvenile crime. Activists came up with an ambitious campaign, which included collaboration with state agencies, departments of justice, various disciplinary institutions, as well as complex processes of monitoring, advocacy and lobbying. To do so, they even created different teams and working groups that would work on developing more narrow areas of expertise. But things did not quite go as planned. In fact, activists' search for a proper form only gave life to more contradictions.

*Civil Society as Ubleha: A Short Critical Note and one Longer Alternative History of Civic Association*

In 2004, Nebojša Šavija – Valha and Ranko Milanović, two local laborers in the internationally managed process of civil society building, published a satirical essay entitled “Ubleha for Idiots – Absolutely Unnecessary Guide through Civil Society Building and Project Management for Locals and Internationals in BiH and Beyond.” The guide takes the form of a lexicon of expert civil society terms, organized around one specific word: *ubleha*. To use Šavija's own words:

[Ubleha is a v]irtually non-translatable Bosnian word that has pejorative use to denominate something that is presented as real while it is nothing. A person who presents him/herself as full of virtues, skills and knowledge, [but] is [actually] a charlatan is called “ublehaš(ica)” (2009, 2).

The sharp-tongued essay, which has since been reprinted by online portals *E-Novine* and Banja Luka based *byka*, provides a series of insightful definitions. For example, *long-term project goals* are defined as “the stupidest, senseless story with which one can trick the donor: a total *ubleha*.” A virtual place where *ubleha* lives while taking different forms is a *training seminar*, which also has its own *seminar mafia*, “the avant-garde of democratization in one country, which unfortunately has trouble distinguishing itself from actual mafia.” *Civil society* comes to be defined as “not only the opposite of military society... but as [something] not quite political, social, economic nor only urban; no one knows for sure, but it sounds good; also one of the WHR “Words of higher register” which from start to finish are a quintessential *ubleha*.”

Since its publication, the essay has enjoyed enormous popularity among former and current employees of the civil society sector in Bosnia, critically inclined analysts in the Balkans and various scholars of regional civil society (see Stubbs 2007 for an eponymous essay; also Helms 2003). It has captured the attention of so many precisely because of it put in no uncertain terms some of the contradictions that have marked the promotion of democratization and participatory citizenship in postwar Bosnia. The essay also effectively echoes some of the dominant lines of criticisms generated by Bosnians who have been for years observing first-hand the effects of international peacemaking presence. To me the essay is of interest as a way of introducing the question of why would an otherwise politically savvy and well-informed group of people, such as the leaders of “Građani,” opt to take on the form that would put them at risk of becoming, or at least being perceived, as *ublehaši*? To answer that question, I must first consider how the discursive equation of “civil society” with a form of *nothingness that pretends to be real*, became possible in the first place. I will then offer some ways of thinking about what Citizen Action was after when it decided to register as a formal organization.

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The problems of civil society building in the Balkans and Eastern Europe more broadly have been on the radar of anthropologists and area studies experts for nearly twenty years. The term became a powerful marker of post-1989 “transition” to market democracy, but its use in the region actually began before the collapse of socialism. In the introduction to his influential volume dedicated to challenging western models of civil society, Chris Hann charts out a trajectory of use of the term in Eastern Europe, starting with the Czech dissidents, who embraced a romanticized understanding of civil society in order to define a collective agent “combating a demonic state” (Hann 1996, 7). Hann is critical of the self-congratulatory tone, naïve idealism and the implicit adherence to liberal-individualism that characterizes these dissident claims (e.g. Havel 1985), pointing out that they not only overly simplify power relations under state socialism but also discount alternative or supplementary relationships and arrangements that characterized socialist societies. Given the marked differences between Czechoslovakian and Yugoslav case, similar rhetoric had been more tempered in Yugoslavia during the same period. Yet this view of civil society as a righteous David fighting against the Goliath of totalitarianism can sometimes be encountered in descriptions of democracy-ushering social movements in Slovenia and Croatia during the 1990s, and most prominently, though in a slightly different register, in the work of Croatian liberals and wartime anti-nationalist dissidents such as Slavenka Drakulić (esp. in Drakulić 1993).

The latter argument runs along the following lines: Yugoslavs had been too busy enjoying the good socialist life to form a vibrant civil society that could realize authentic democratization and prevent the bloodshed of the 1990s. Rather than see the war as a systematic effort to demobilize the population (Gagnon 2004) or destroy alternatives (Gordy 1999), Drakulić charges the citizens with the failure to embrace proper liberal-individualism and its associated forms of political engagement. As if by a slight of hand, Drakulić casts them as simply having been—then, as they are now—entrapped by apathy and made victims by forces whose existence they refused to acknowledge.

Questions of civic responsibility for the war deserve more careful treatment than I am able to offer here (though see Ch3 and Ch4 on antipolitics and intergenerational responsibility). However, the assertion that apathy and disengagement have been markers of public culture in socialist Yugoslavia (and even a cause for the war) is in some ways deeply misleading and deserves to be problematized. The position must be engaged all the more because the same and similar arguments affect present-day thinking about “the problem” of civic disengagement from politics. To start, the contemporary accusation relies on a selective interpretation of citizenship under state-socialism, which demanded, both theoretically and practically, a society-wide compulsory politicization and participation in the socialist institutions. Under Yugoslav self-managing socialism, this impetus towards participation played an even more important ideological role, prompting experiments with workers councils and later the representatives based delegate system. The results of these innovations were mixed; liberalization of the economy and politics (of which workers councils were a major component) led in part to strong economic growth, but the practices of self-management favored the technocratic elite, reproduced stratification and led to new forms of worker alienation. Nevertheless, the struggle to include workers and make them active in decision-making suggests that Yugoslav communists

cared about and were committed to a version of “democratic” participation.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the socialist state provided the institutional context and funding for various forms of associationism and activism. While not everyone belonged to the League of Communists in socialist Yugoslavia, almost all adults were members of the Yugoslav Workers Socialist Alliance (Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije), which oversaw a host of so-called “social-political organizations” (društveno političke organizacije), including youth and student unions. In the Socialist Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina alone, in 1989 there were 5,000 registered “udruženja građana”—or civic associations (Papić et al. 2011, 57). Most of them were operating in the capital city (as has remained the case), but they covered a wide array of activities and interests, including hobbies such as mountaineering and bee keeping, but also encompassed syndicates, trade unions and different kinds of professional associations.

Such organizations were subjects of the communist-lead state, and were not coterminous with the ideal model of civil society detailed in the writings of Locke, Hobbs, Adam Ferguson, or Tocqueville, for whom a civil society was a meeting place of self-interested individuals acting independently from the state. Although most contemporary theorists of civil society acknowledge this sector is never fully divorced from the institutional context of the state, there is still a tendency to view “totalitarian” socialist societies as having never offered any space for such forms of association and debate. But this does not mean that opportunities for association did not exist, or that certain conceptions of mass political participation did not have their own value and place in socialist societies. In Jajce, for example, starting in the 1970s, local professionals and community leaders founded an organization whose job was to raise ecological consciousness and increase protection of the environment, which was very active in bringing to light consequences of industrial pollution. The socialist state not only tolerated these organizations, but provided funding and an audience for their operations, and occasionally even took seriously their recommendations. “Udruženje građana,” which is still one of the two legal terms for a non-governmental organization, is a category that predates the arrival of international democracy promoters. Nor was the socialist state the first to do offer citizens a chance to associate. According to the study of Ismet Sefija (2008), various kinds of associations, including charities, interests groups, literary societies and religious organizations, existed in Bosnia continuously since the Austro-Hungarian rule.

The processes of democracy promotion in the Balkans, and in particular in Bosnia, placed the accent on introduction of new forms, new idioms and new institutions (Sampson 2002, also Helms 2003), even though individual “internationals” often acknowledged, at least in speech, the import of existing histories and prewar experiences (see Coles 2007; also Gilbert 2008). In this process of “nation-building,” their local collaborators and the people who their projects targeted, sometimes experienced their interference as patronizing, belittling and disrespectful. The technocratic and elitist aspect of these interventions, and the ways they made apparent internationals’ and their protégées’ privileges and uneven access to various kinds of resources, often helped generate a critical or downright cynical response to what otherwise had an appearance of authoritative, expert forms of knowledge. I would also argue that living through the end of one political “regime” and the painful constitution of another, endowed many Bosnian citizens with remarkable ability to critically reflect on the differences and similarities of both political eras, and their theory and practice. It also made many people appreciate better the

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<sup>4</sup> Yugoslav theorists, propagandists and intellectuals routinely used the word “democratic” to describe self-management and its unique arrangements. Because their understanding of democracy was predicated on redistribution and not rights, I have placed this use in quotation marks to signal the difference.

socialist period, and recognize that “democratization,” just like socialist revolution, was on some level a sum of empty platforms or ideological parables. The sardonic tone of the “ubleha” critique with which I began this section, attempts to give voice the frustrations borne out of these encounters and lessons.<sup>5</sup>

After the initial unquestioned exuberance among a portion of Bosnian analysts and researchers about the possibilities of civil society, more recent assessments of the problems of civic participation have not only been more critical but are starting to give attention to the pre-1992 histories of civic association.<sup>6</sup> For some, still, the question is not so much whether civil society has existed in the past, but whether it exists today. In a 2011 report “Myth and Reality of Civil Society” published by the Social Inclusion Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the group of local authors poses the question whether Bosnia has an actual civil society or simply “its quantitative illusion, without civic character,” and does it have an effect on social developments? The report takes a critical stance with respect to the influence of the international aid industry, whose members helped develop numerous NGOs in order to satisfy their own needs for local partner organizations (Papić et al. 2011, 9). The focus of the report lies especially on the production of the new “NVO elite” which has contributed to the exclusionary character and disconnection of these organizations from the rest of society. Nevertheless, like many of the previous such reports, which have chronicled the “lessons (not) learned,” the publication continues to take for granted that having an *actual* civil society is an unquestionable good. The implicit assumption is that the mistakes lie with implementation, plagued by problems like inadequately developed capacities, uneven levels of professional, administrative and technical competence, shrinking availability of funding and the related decreasing autonomy (e.g. the phenomenon of state or party controlled “non-governmental” organizations [*vladine nevladine organizacije*]). What’s more, concerns about the lack of civic consciousness and the virtues of citizen participation at large, remain.

I should say that I am less interested here in whether or not an “actual” civil society is possible in Bosnia, one that would replicate the ideal type conceived in the bourgeois sphere of early modern Western Europe and post-Independence War United States out of an intersection of particular political, economic and social transformations. Rather, I want to attend to the traffic of ideas produced by the postwar democratization effort, which has popularized the term “civil society” in the public discourse while promoting a very particular interventionist paradigm. This traveling term, as ambiguous as it is, has acquired all sorts of new regional meanings, imaginings and accompanying grievances, which have transformed it into an ethnographic, and not merely conceptual category. To understand both the definition of civil society as a supreme “ubleha,” and the rationales of Citizen Action members, one has to pay attention to the travails of this term. In the second place, I wish to make a rather simple point that Dayton did not introduce for the first time the idea and practice of political participation. Liberal-democracy does not hold monopoly over political inclusion nor is it the only intellectual tradition seeking to promote

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of democracy, too long to include in the text, is nevertheless very illustrative of a wisecracking Bosnian’s point of view: “once known under various names, such as slavery, imperialism, “we don’t want what belongs to others, but we won’t give up our own” etc. A set of sophisticated procedures helped by depleted uranium bombs, all with the purpose of making one people come to its senses and realize it is better to make ubleha than work in a supermarket, that it is better to have a cushy seat and salary (guzovaču) than plant corn, that it is better to go to a seminar than study at a university in some other canton, etc. Some groups realize this earlier and some later. Some never come to their senses, but those even this guide cannot help.”

<sup>6</sup> Ironically, many of these investigations have been funded and supported by prominent foreign donors, think tanks and NGOs, who in an effort to figure out “what went wrong” are now turning their attention to histories of activism and previously existing organizations.

active citizenship. And neither NGOs nor civil society are the last word on political activism.

In light of this complex history, it becomes clear why Citizen Action's debate "formalizing" equaled entering a political minefield. Conscious of the unimpressive record of Bosnian postwar civil society, they set out on a journey of critique and transformation. But they had to articulate this effort in the form that was recognizable and subject to existing conventions. Ironically, in placing the word "udruženje" [association] into their title, as supposed to "nevladina organizacija" they inadvertently also hinted at the fact their political imagination was a product of multiple, and overlapping histories. In these symbolic orders, old-fashioned vocabularies mixed with hip new words, while conventional, seemingly unimaginative and rigid practices took place side by side next to innovative acts of provocation. In fact, the organization's openness and promiscuous behavior with respect to form, and its use of both to old and new tactics, mirrored the pull of deep anchors and new possibilities that marks Bosnian postwar society at large.

One could also say that the focus of Citizen Action had always been the ends, rather than the means, with which the following chapter shows, they loved to experiment. But their commitments relied also a set of sound ethical principles born out of a lived predicament. Despite their many disagreements, association's members shared the conviction that Bosnian society was in deep trouble, and that the only thing that could insure an inhabitable future was a concerted effort of the masses to grab hold of the ship's helm. But the problem, at least according to Dinko lied with the general climate in the country, one which he described by offering a potent analogy:

We are a society...that needs an event ...imagine, for example, that we are sitting here and enjoying our coffee, drinks, etc., and we see a glass bottle on the square that breaks into thousand little pieces. We will speak...for days about the fact this bottle broke, how it broke, etc., but not one of us will even think about getting up and cleaning up those glass pieces. No one will ask why the glass bottle fell in the first place, or how can we prevent future falls...but we are all ready to talk about how it fell and broke into many pieces. The same thing happened with the protests... since then, a half of a year after the big protests happened...we still talk about it and evoke memories, we...sit in our coffeehouses...but no one, even among that small group of people that took part ...in those rare moments of lucidity...even they today do not do anything else but talk about the protests! We have a word (for this): *palamudjenje* [empty talk, philosophizing, posturing], and it means to switch from empty to hollow talk [*presipati iz šupljeg u prazno*, lit. spill words, as if they were liquid, from a hollow into an empty canister]. No one wants to get up and do something concrete.

Dinko's analogy of the broken glass bottle about which everyone talks but upon which no one acts, on the surface level appears to be a standard criticism of an apathetic society whose members spend their days in coffeehouses, wasting away through idle chatter.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, cries about apathy, and "neaktivizam," would continue to feature prominently in the conversations, and sometimes written texts of Citizen Action's members. But it is also an indirect criticism of both the existing civil society organizations, and the philosophizing, posturing public that always has an opinion but rarely steps up to do concrete things. Dinko's accent on *concreteness* of action, in part helps explain his dedication to the idea of formalization, which on the surface level provided an actionable, organizable model for the prolongation of a diminishing

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<sup>7</sup> It is also an unintended critique of Habermas' uncritical valorization of dialogue, conversation and the critical public, of which as Dinko suggests, there is too much in present-Day Bosnia.

momentum of a civic mobilization. And in a related manner, his diagnosis of emptiness of talk resonated with what would subsequently become Citizen Action's a practical philosophy of *akcija*, a term borrowed in a playful, endearing manner from the socialist era.

What follows is an ethnographic and historical analysis of this term, which the activists also chose as one-half of their official name. My intervention is meant to lend further support to the abovementioned point that the Yugoslav socialist state had its own understanding of civic engagement, and accordingly developed proper pedagogic instruments to both develop and nurture practices of participation. In other words, if political apathy had been inherited from, and as Drakulić suggests marked late socialism, so have some of its purported remedies. Nonetheless, my analysis shows also the limits of the revitalization of this technology among what I will term as “second-generation” civic associations, or organizations formed in late 2000s with the explicit purpose of rescuing civic activism from the grip of “first generation” NGOs. Their model of activism distinguished itself through an almost militant commitment to direct, practical, and embodied acts of intervention, and simultaneous suspicion of “mere words”—be they in print or oral form. This new approach, activists hoped, would help them channel their activities as the more authentic “voice of the people.”

### *People of Action: Recuperating Civic Participation*

In spite of Citizen Action's unmistakable name, the commitment to direct action did not belong to this organization alone, nor was their newly registered civic association the first framework within which its members had tried to “do something concrete.” In fact, before 2008, many of the protesters had previously taken part in similar kinds of activities while volunteering with other informal groups in Sarajevo, including the movement “Dosta” from the previous chapter and more importantly, the humanitarian association “Dobro.” Although Dosta had attracted admiration for its small ritual gatherings in front of the Parliament buildings, former *Dostaši* also criticized the hierarchical tendencies of the group's leadership that left no room for new personalities. By contrast, most Citizen Action members venerated, admired and wished to emulate the level of organization, the spirited commitment and “concreteness” of Dobro's actions.

Dobro [eng. “(the) Good”] began as an informal initiative developed on the popular online discussion forum on Sarajevo-X, the same platform used by the protesters in Sarajevo in 2008. In fact, many of the people who participated in the demonstrations, and later joined Citizen Action, grew their organizing muscles through involvement in Dobro's humanitarian activism. The group's first campaign consisted of gathering donations for and distributing New Year's “gift packages” [*paketići*] to disadvantaged children. The successes of this project paved the way for future fundraising efforts, including the popular food donations drives— Dobro “akcije” [lit. “actions”]—known by their slogan “One good, a hundred hands, a thousand fed” [*Jedno dobro, stotinu ruku, hiljadu sitih*]. The premise has been simple: every first Saturday in the month, small groups of volunteers meet in various shopping malls and supermarkets. On site, volunteers encourage shoppers to buy a few extra items and donate them to the organization. As items accumulate, they are packed in large boxes and labeled with names and addresses of families in need who will receive these donations that very same afternoon.<sup>8</sup> The entire process,

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<sup>8</sup> Originally, a Sarajevo based campaign, these food donation drives have spread to a number cities and towns across Bosnia-Herzegovina.



from start to finish, is organized and managed by volunteers, who have developed a complex system for evaluation of needs and distribution of aid.



**Figure 33:** Flier announcing a “One good, a hundred hands, a thousand fed” Dobro Akcija from 2008, in Lukavica shopping center, located on the outskirts of Sarajevo (now RS controlled “Srpsko Sarajevo”). Photo courtesy of Berina Hamzić

Disillusioned by party politics, nationalism and corruption, activists of Dobro for the most part avoid taking positions on political issues and focus instead on humanitarian work. Some of them believe conventional political activism is a waste of time; hence they prefer doing something practical, such as gathering donations of food, clothing and school supplies and distributing them to the needy. Had their campaigns not become so popular, demanding that the organization acquire a legal status and a bank account, Dobro may never had registered in the first place. Today, the central aspect of its mission is to “change perspective about the world” and to “inspire everyone to do something good.” Consequently, in addition to functioning as fundraising programs, their actions are a form of moral pedagogy<sup>9</sup> that promotes civic virtue and altruism as a proper way of acting in the world. In practice, its activities forge new grounds of ethical thought and action, whose political potential—despite the groups claim to be antipolitical—cannot be ignored.

Indeed, the transformation of attitudes of individuals and development of “social consciousness” [društvena svijest] are key aspects of Dobro’s programs. Although Dobro shies away from explicit critique of capitalism, its founders are nevertheless profoundly concerned with the demise of social solidarity and moral responsibility that they have witnessed in the

<sup>9</sup> Thirty-year-old “Amar,” a levelheaded economist who is very active both Citizen Action and Dobro, particularly appreciates the fact potential Dobro donors can meet and even visit families that they are helping. Although staging such a meeting could easily become problematic (namely because it turns poverty into a spectacle and exposes vulnerable people to even greater shame), Amar is convinced that the benefits outweighed the risks. In his view, this practice helps build trust in the organization, while also rendering this act of solidarity more meaningful and potentially transformative to the donor.



postwar era. The organization's very name signals its desire to promote virtuous conduct through engaging individuals in various forms of direct action and by reviving the commitment to (public) good. In that sense, Dobro shares with Citizen Action the concerns about and the desire for return of ethical conduct and sincerity back into politics and public life.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 34:** Activists of “Dobro” gathering donations in kind during one of the Saturday’s “akcije.” Photo courtesy of Armin Pihljak

Members of Citizen Action, many of who have through their own involvement, had first hand perspective on Dobro’s method of work, admired its no-nonsense, fast-acting and highly efficient style of activism. They also saw an organization that similarly brought together strangers willing to give up their time and resources to greater social good as intrinsically analogous to their own. Importantly, this sense of kinship persisted even though on some level, the programs of the two groups seemed antithetical. Dobro’s humanitarian activities seemed to inadvertently encourage the privatization of social responsibility, which contrasted Citizen Action’s demand for the strengthening of state institutions. On occasion, individual activists in Citizen Action would tell me that groups like Dobro, which extended help to the vulnerable, contributed to the docility of these potentially radical groups, and were therefore a part of the

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<sup>10</sup> Although Dobro’s procedures are sophisticated and often quite effective, their effect on the people involved from both sides of the process is not free of contradictions. As an example, take note of the story offered to me during an interview by Elma, an activist of both Citizen Action and Dobro. One day, Dobro received an especially upsetting call by a man whom its activists were trying to help. He called to complain about the quality of the aid package he received, comparing its contents to “dog food” and concluding that Dobro’s activists were also—dogs. Moments like this demanded collective reflection; Elma told me that these kinds of encounters reminded her that “being good equals being a fool.” She explained that the problem was not just this man’s ungratefulness, but the fact small groups of activists were fighting an uphill battle against pervasive disintegration of social norms. But Elma also insisted that doing this was no longer a matter of choice; disillusionment was part of the game and in some sense the motor behind one’s commitment to continue to do this, against all odds. One could also read Elma’s shock as a sign of her naiveté as well as of a particular sort of self-righteousness. Indeed, Dobro’s rhetoric and model do not really allow for critical questioning of the premises of “altruism” or how its trickle down approach is also very harmful to the notions of solidarity that they hold so dear. While I acknowledge this aspect of the organization’s work merits more analysis, I do not have adequate space to pursue such a line of questioning here.

apparatus that held in place status quo. But in practice, these philosophical differences did not seem to matter much to either group, partly because in the overlap in membership, but also because the two groups were seen to be two very different kinds of activist projects.

Citizen Action had its unique take on what constituted proper activist work or direct action. Having become a political force “on the street,” the organization’s activists maintained a strong preference for protest and various forms of provocations and street actions that put them in touch with other citizens. For example, in a series of actions called “My Neighborhood” they went “in the field” to collect reports and grievances from local residents against various municipal services and agencies, which they later turned into formal inquiries with the officials in the municipal government. These reports at least in theory demanded an official response and a resolution of citizens’ problems. Citizen Action also repainted the street monuments known as “Sarajevo’s roses” in order to expose the city’s government neglectful behavior towards these sites and teach those responsible that they need to do a better job taking care of the city. Most recently, amidst record-breaking snowfall, they organized volunteers to clear the snow off the flat roof of the Historical Museum in Sarajevo, one of the cultural institutions, which is facing closure.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these *concrete* interventions, these activists often staged more creative interventions, many of which employed puppetry and different forms of parody as a means of political reeducation of both government officials and members of the disinterested public.



**Figure 35:** Left, photograph of “Sarajevo Roses” akcija. Sarajevo, summer 2009

**Figure 36:** Right, members of CA stage a performance “Festival of Death” in front of the Office of the Prosecutor to protest another gruesome murder. Sarajevo, summer 2009

The emphasis on practice of direct activism and engagement that the two groups shared trumpeted any ideological disagreements. Specifically, what appealed to Citizen Action about Dobro’s work was emphasis on “akcija”—small-scale activities and acts of civic involvement that invoked in name and to some extent philosophy an older socialist form of political and social participation. In Bosnia, the term “akcija<sup>12</sup>” calls to mind a historically recognizable format of

<sup>11</sup> This problem is happening in part because the Bosnian state does not have a Ministry of Culture, which would fund and protect such cultural institutions.

<sup>12</sup> As in the rest of Eastern Europe, in Bosnia the word “akcija” nowadays also refers to a shopping sale in supermarkets and other stores. To the best of my knowledge, this new use of the term is a postsocialist phenomenon. While certainly ironic, akcija-as-sale makes sense, if one begins with the premise that consumerism can lead to new forms of self-fashioning and personal fulfillment.

civic engagement, made famous by the popular post-WII socialist-era work actions in Yugoslavia. Today's *activist* "actions" are much smaller in scale and aspiration from nation building projects of that era, and they also come in a variety of forms. Nevertheless, across their differences, contemporary varieties of "akcija" involve a distinct set of sensibilities and orientations. They encompass direct bodily engagement, immediacy, short termness, strong moral commitment, frequently an astonishing amount of *communitas*—and what is most important, a pedagogical effect on their participants. For "second-generation" civic associations, *akcija* is not just a means to an end, but a mode of political and ethical life, capable of reconstituting the link between individual responsibility<sup>13</sup> and social solidarity<sup>14</sup>.

The pedagogical aspect of direct action—the ways this orientation helps cultivate new forms of personhood and togetherness— keeps activists committed even in contexts where their activities leave little material trace. Activists engaged in these practices wish not only to transform their society but also to set an example to others, by means of cultivating a distinct set of ethical dispositions predicated on sincerity, volunteerism, active citizenship and in the case of *Dobro*, altruism<sup>15</sup>. In so doing, they are also struggling to redefine the parameters and forms of political participation, as a way to challenge what they perceive to be a growing apathy in their society. Promoting "active" and direct modes of civic intervention, these groups have at once responded to and problematized the (internationally sponsored) project of postwar democratization, for which fostering participatory citizenship has been the central concern (Greenberg 2010, Rose Ackerman 2007; also Creed and Wedel 1997). By reimagining social and political activism as a form of concrete work, they have sought to respond to breakdown of political authority and civic responsibility that has followed the end of the war.

In offering "akcija" as a cure for the postwar impasse, Sarajevo activists demonstrate also the extent to which parameters for what counts as proper political action have already been set by historical experience. This poses a challenge to ambitious projects of postwar democratizations, which tend to ignore or dismiss long-standing sensibilities, orientations and the very structures of affect of the people upon whom they are intervening. What makes these dispositions so powerful is the extent to which they are taken for granted and appear natural and ahistorical. By focusing on the historicity of "akcija," this chapter also demonstrates the extent to which transformations of political practice in postsocialist societies rely on recuperation and perhaps even translation of recognizable idioms into new, liberal-democratic institutional settings.

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<sup>13</sup> Although individualism, self regulation and the privatization of responsibility are usually discussed in relation to (neo)liberal ideology and projects, it is important to remember that socialist states were also very interested in cultivating ethos of individual responsibility and enterprise among their subjects. In Yugoslavia, one such model responsibility derives from the history of antifascist resistance and is popularly known as "partisan ethics." Partisan ethics implies that one is to be severely punished for even the smallest mistake or indiscretion, because what is at stake is not just the act itself but the very character of society and its moral life.

<sup>14</sup> In political philosophy, the concept of action has been most prominently developed by Hanna Arendt who differentiated action from other modes of human activity, including labor and work, insisting that action ties into the human capacity to for new beginnings. She famously criticized Marx for having confused these types of activity, subsuming action into the more primitive domains of labor and work, which have to do with bodily engagement with the world. The activists among whom I did fieldwork have inherited such a "conflation" from socialist ideology, and emphasize "akcija" less as a reflection of a capacity to begin something new than as form of civic engagement that is productive of transforming people who take part in it, and engendering new kinds of solidarity. My impulse has therefore been to treat "akcija" as a situated--ethnographic and historical—category, rather than a theoretical concept.

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## *Specters of Postwars*

Members of Citizens Action in charge of planning street actions called themselves “akcijaši”—a term of endearment that indexed a very special aspect of socialist history. The term “akcija” (in a sense of political practice) does not have an obvious equivalent in English, where similar types of political events can be described as campaigns, operations, protests, interventions, etc. In the (post)Yugoslav space, the term almost automatically evokes the history of socialist Youth Work Actions [*Omladinske radne akcije*] or ORAs. Such “akcije” began as a technology of nation building and one of the political pedagogies employed by the Yugoslav state in the early decades of the post-WWII period. Yugoslav communist party, and particularly its leader, Marshal Tito, had great investment and faith in this form of political socialization, which simultaneously helped the postwar reconstruction and modernization effort, while turning young people into proper socialist men and women (see Šupek 1963). It is often said that work actions helped build Yugoslavia; some of the largest and most significant railways, highways and dams (which are still in use today) came into existence through the labor of youth volunteers. Despite their fame, youth work actions could become very expensive and difficult to facilitate—and this aspect of their organization degraded their economic impact. Already in the late 1960s, some state economists were suggesting that this practice be discontinued because its economic advantages were marginal (Tito 1974 [1967], 148).



**Figure 37:** Left, images of the famed ORA Brčko-Banovići organized to build a railroad.

**Figure 38:** Right above, an image from a later ORA

However, high-ranking officials, including the late Yugoslav president, passionately defended such projects, arguing that their economic purpose was already secondary to their much more important pedagogical character, which functioned on multiple levels. Work actions venerated physical labor [*fizička kultura*], created proper work habits, could serve as vehicles for ideological socialization and party recruitment, promoted excellence through competition, and most importantly, brought together young people from all around the former Yugoslavia (Tito 1974 [1967], 147-1951). During youth work actions, young women and men from different

republics, and various professional, ‘class’<sup>16</sup> and ethnic backgrounds worked side by side. In addition to railroads and highways, they were also building “brotherhood and unity” and thereby creating new forms of social solidarity across ethnic lines (Mihailović 1974, 265).



**Figure 39:** Members of Citizen Action remove record snowfall from the roof of the Historical museum, to prevent its collapse. Photo courtesy of Elma Hašimbegović

Regardless of whether work actions succeeded in their political aims, they captured a prominent seat in the historical imagination of the “baby boomer” generations, even among the people who never participated in them. The early post-WWII work actions were also carried out with incredible élan, as many of their participants had already taken part in or witnessed the struggle for national liberation. Participation in the most important ORAs was a great privilege, and frequently hinged on the ability to secure (through achievements, competition or connections) a spot in one of the worker brigades. Volunteers in these actions acquired significant amounts of symbolic capital, and were affectionately termed “akcijaši.” Those who achieved special successes, notable levels of productivity, or participated in a large number of actions, would receive ordains of “udarnici” and become heroes of the nation.

But this heroism came at a price: as a form of disciplinary technology, ORAs resembled compulsory military service in the Yugoslav National Army, and represented one particular aspect of the militarization of the entire society. Some brigadiers were undoubtedly coerced into taking part in such forms of volunteer labor, and despite powerful propaganda, many remained profoundly ambivalent about the ideological narratives that propelled these public works. As decades rolled by, patriotic zeal also dwindled, while the social aspect of these events increased. Young people who participated in these actions were often motivated less by political ideology and more by the promise of a good time, which often included camping, barbecues, drinking, new friendships and new love interests. Because of these factors, ORAs achieved an iconic status in popular culture, generating music albums, novels and great many mythologies (Adrić 2005; Novačić 2005). They also figure as an important theme in the repertoire of contemporary

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<sup>16</sup> Despite socialist aspirations, Yugoslav society had many different axes of social stratification, based on economic, but also political and symbolic capital. Since the processes of nationalization were not as dramatic in Yugoslavia (i.e. no collectivization of farms took place, not all private property was abolished, etc.), some class differences carried over from the pre-socialist period. After WWII, the processes of industrialization and modernization lead to the appearance of new professional classes and new divisions between rural and urban dwellers. Finally, members of the Communist Party managed to accumulate so much economic, social and political capital, that they emerged as an elite class of their own (see Đilas 1959).

Yugonostalgia, as they appeal to times of individual and collective greatness, sacrifice, high moral commitments and sincerity in public life.

Because of their association with the spectacular postwar modernization of Yugoslavia, ORAs recall not only particular historical experiences but also distinct aspirations about the relationship between human action and the future. While the 1990s war compromised this faith in history-as-progress, the postwar period placed them back at the heart of public discourse. This time, however, the developmentalist state (of which Yugoslavia was perhaps the prime example) no longer existed as the institutional and political framework within which such aspirations could be realized.<sup>17</sup> As a result, in contrast to the much-venerated economic successes of the 1950s and 1960s, the end of the last war played out as a profound letdown. In the moment marked by pervasive postwar disillusionment about the future, ORAs invoke an alternative moral imaginary out of which a critique of the present can be generated.



Figure 40: A poster announcing an upcoming ORA: “Don’t let the corn in Srem rot while people in other parts go hungry.” Photo courtesy of ORA Podgradci 2009, and Duško Malešević

Just like the affair around Deda Mraz, the revalorization of civic engagement may be thought of as a form of postsocialist sincerity about communist practices and symbols (Yurchak 2008). It is a return to those aspects of socialism which previously had seemed naïve or too idealistic, but today may offer one way to imagine the world otherwise. In this case, sincerity is the mirror image and perhaps even a product of late socialist cynicism and postsocialist skepticism. Yet again, this recuperation shows the extent to which Yugoslav socialism was a successful world-making project. Even though its ideological narratives no longer fare well, the orientations that the socialist state and its institutions were able to cultivate have survived. They also lay the ground for interpretation and acts of intervention in the contemporary period, including the development of democratic institutions and forms.

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<sup>17</sup> The process I describe here is in no way unique to Bosnia; anthropologists of contemporary Africa have written extensively about the demise of the developmentalist state (Ferguson 1999, Roitman 2004, Piot 2010).

Both younger and older activists of Citizen Action found in the notion of “akcija” an alternative language and form for reimagining political participation. The connotation of the word, as well as the nickname “akcijaši” were seen as positive markers, even though the socialist origin of these terms was left unelaborated and was simply taken for granted. Like many other residents of Sarajevo, who due to the city’s multiethnic character and cosmopolitan history considered themselves an embodiment of Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity,” members of Citizen Action had a great deal of sympathy for Tito’s socialist vision. Middle aged activists, who entered adulthood during the time Yugoslavia still existed, sometimes offered anecdotes from the socialist period or explicit points of comparison to highlight the dysfunction of the post-Dayton state. For example, while speaking about the moral crisis in Bosnian society, Dinko recounted to me a story of a his childhood neighbor, a middle aged grocery shop worker, who received a harsh prison sentence for a minor act of theft. The story brought to fore the notion of “partisan morality” [*partizanski moral*], which began as a philosophy among Yugoslav guerilla fighters during WWII. This model of morality later came to describe other punitive practices of the socialist state designed to keep alive impeccable ethical character of individuals and groups. Partisans, fighting the war within and without, turned to execution even in the cases of the smallest criminal offenses, such as “stealing a pack of plums.” Such acts rendered the hand of law visible and swift, and testified to the existence of an institutional and moral system, which my interlocutors now complained was absent in postwar Bosnia.

On occasion, older Citizen Action members also commented on the differences between the two periods of reconstruction, one managed by the socialist state and the other by the internationals and the new ethno-nationalist elites. One among them was Vernesa, a 47-year-old lawyer employed in one of the international overseeing organizations, who was also a member of Citizen Action. Working in the very heart of the postwar “transition machine,” Vernesa was able to secure a very comfortable life for herself and her family. But despite (or maybe because of) being an insider into the processes of postwar reconstruction, she was not an unconditional fan of internationally designed reforms. She compared the whole process to an incident in one of the field offices of her organization:

“One time, [our] employees...had a problem with their furnace. Instead of making one small repair, they threw it out, claiming that it was old and ready for garbage. That’s how we are acting today [with respect to postwar reforms]. We now claim all aspects of the old system were bad, and we want to throw everything away, irrespectively of whether we actually have an alternative...we take these new ideas without even thinking about whether they will work [here]. It would make far more sense if we took those aspects of the old system that worked and continued with them, modified those that are good but no longer possible, and only when it becomes necessary, replaced old procedures with new ones. This would be far more efficient and far less painful.” (2009 interview, translation mine)

In portraying the postwar period in this way, Vernesa was neither valorizing all aspects of socialism nor insisting that Bosnia should become again a socialist state. She was instead positing that the engineers of this new reconstruction effort had much to learn from their socialist predecessors, particularly when it came to mobilizing society to work toward a better future. She admitted that she frequently thinks about and stands in awe of the fact Yugoslav leadership could organize the people of such diverse profiles and from a relatively large space to work towards a common agenda. Her yearning to take place in a similar form of a collective effort brought her to the streets during the 2008 protests, and eventually to Citizen Action.



There, she found people with whom she shared little else but a sense of urgency about the future. But together with her collaborators, she learned that good will does not necessarily yield results, particularly in the absence of a framework where certain programs can be realized. Citizens' Action lacked the resources or the proper disciplinary tools to keep its activists in line; it had ambitious plans but no ideological cohesion, which in of itself could serve as a form of pedagogy. It sustained itself mostly through the affective ties and the sense of *communitas* that emerged precisely out of the engrossing nature of its protests and other direct actions. This strong sense of shared orientations attracted people like Vernesa to the organization. Ironically, as Citizen Action began to drown in its own bureaucratic inertia, Vernesa chastised the leadership for its inability to move forward. After a heated exchange with other activists, she withdrew from the organization and stopped attending the meetings.

*From the Streets to the Meeting Hall: The Pitfalls of Being an NGO*

Though Vernesa's fallout with the organization at the time seemed a bit dramatic, over the long run it turned out to be indicative of a trend. Citizen Action's problems began almost immediately upon registration. First, activists faced the challenge of drafting their charter, mission and accompanying documents. Despite their high levels of education and the professional advice from lawyers within and outside of the organization, the organization charter had to be revised multiple times. Certain provisions pertaining to the work of the founders' assembly [*osnivačka skupština udruženja*] had initially been construed too ambitiously. When members did not show up during special meetings of these assemblies, the organization did not have a quorum and the procedures had to be repeated. At some point, overly enthusiastic and indiscriminate registration of new members introduced new problems with attaining a quorum, because the growth in numbers of members did not necessarily result in better-attended meetings. To make matters worse, activists received conflicting advice, and had to conduct their own research in order to get to the bottom of some of the legal rules. Such problems were particularly frustrating for people who, having decided to become a collective legal subject [*pravni subjekat*], cared deeply about their papers and procedures being in line with the law. "How can we demand anyone else follow the law, if we can't do it ourselves?" was the exclamation that I often heard repeated.



**Figure 41 and Figure 42:** Bureaucracy that cannibalizes activism: snapshots of Citizen Action meetings. Sarajevo, 2009.



The desire to “do things right” extended into other domains of work, particularly the question of implementation of the project for which the organization received funds. Activists planned to reach out to government agencies, different institutions and experts on the ground, not only to work on repairing the fragile juvenile justice system, but also in order to learn more about the actual situation in some of these institutions. To that end, on several occasions, Citizen Action met with management and employees of disciplinary centers, service providing NGOs, various state agencies and even the mayoral cabinet. Most of the time, such meetings were cordial if not amicable, but they often yielded little follow-up. One time, things turned ugly when an unprepared delegation of Citizen Action activists visited one of the juvenile centers, and accused the employees of poor performance. Social workers lashed out in return, pointing out the various ways in fact Citizen Action lacked basic knowledge and understanding of how the juvenile system worked. After much embarrassment, activists agreed to “study the problematic” and return better informed. Following this incident, they requested more information from a range of institutions, citing freedom of public information. While it took the agencies a long time to supply this information, it took the organization even longer to find the time to read through it all and decide what to do about it.

These troubles reflected a larger, structural problem. Aside from the one administrative worker, who was hired internally and received a small stipend, Citizen Action had been formed by a group of enthusiastic volunteers, the great majority of whom actually had a day job and a family to take care of. Truth be told, some people worked harder and sacrificed more than others. But given the general situation, regular activities, including street campaigns, meetings and assemblies, had to take place during noon lunch-breaks, afternoons and weekends, when members were not busy with work. Finding time to learn about youth delinquency and particular responsibilities of specific institutions, or read reports and policy briefs was very difficult. One could critique their omissions and failed professionalization as a sign on not having tried enough to become what Nikolas Rose termed the self-governing subjects of late liberalism—knowledgeable citizen-experts who take responsibility for their own lives and the needs of their communities. But at a different level, one must appreciate that Citizen Action had from the beginning been advocating the strengthening of central political authority, one that would free the citizen from having to think about such issues as juvenile crime or public safety. To reiterate Plamenko’s point from the last chapter—it is not the citizens’ job to do the work of governing. The running joke in Citizen Action, after all, was the question “When will the government begin to govern?”

Another cluster of issues for the newly formed organization were the personal relationships among its members. On one level, participation in the protests and subsequent years of activist work created profound, deeply felt bonds among activists, most of whom were previously strangers to each other. A sense of *communitas* born out of a collectivist spirit of the protests held the organization together when nothing else was really working. Socializing and enjoyment of each other’s company was one of the main ways in which activists spent time together, often looking for any excuse to hang out in apartments, cafes, bars and sometimes even weekend cottages. One time, forty-six year old Jasmina whose story follows, exclaimed in a uncharacteristic moment of sentimentality: “Whatever happens to us as a group, I will always be glad to have found you, my people, my kind of people...to know that I was not alone.” But this powerful sense of togetherness also had its ugly side. Fights and disagreements among members were a regular occurrence, sometimes escalating into fallouts and one time almost leading to a

physical confrontation. When tasks were left uncompleted, promises unfulfilled and activists once again destined for last minute improvisations, tempers ran high. The infighting among activists also spilled over into the executive board, which was always being reassembled as people decided to quit the organization or step out of their appointed positions. In 2009, the association went through several leadership changes, decided on the basis of character traits (conciliatory, managerial, authoritarian, etc.) with the goal of dealing with certain long-standing problems.

In parallel to these internal struggles, Citizen Action acquired new members, who were located in the nearby town of Zenica, and were interested in forming their own chapter of the organization. Favorable to the personalities that advocated it, including most prominently Muhamed Pivić, the disaffected worker of Komrad, a state owned utility and waste management firm awaiting bankruptcy, and Hasan Kreho, an engineer and a long term environmental activist, Citizen Action decided to expand their brand. But the status of the chapter remained for a long time ambiguous, creating problems in terms of financing and management. By my follow up trip in 2010, infighting had increased, causing serious rifts and leading to a departure of several prominent personalities, including Iris and Jasmina. There were harsh mutual accusations and a lot of blame to go around; questions were raised about leadership, distribution of petty cash, work ethic and many other issues. Iris and Jasmina, both of whom had tried to reform the situation (too) aggressively, in the end left bitter and hurt, further shrinking the numbers of Sarajevo-based middle-aged activists. The younger camp, opposed to the two women, likewise saw their incessant questions and agendas as deeply accusatory and hurtful. As of winter of 2012, the two fractions have not yet reconciled. Meanwhile, the enthusiasm of the remaining members has dwindled, only to awake occasionally for the purpose of staging different small-scale actions. The very dynamic of the organization seems to now mimic the atmosphere of the impasse: steady inertia pierced with surprising, singular moments of interruption.

### *Civic Associations make not States: A necessary digression*

The anti-political bent of Dobro's activism, and the failures of Citizen Action to realize its long term goals, illuminate the tensions emerging out of the collision of one particular set of political and ethical dispositions, which were cultivated during socialism—with a new set of political and social realities. Dobro's effort to promote virtuous and altruistic conduct in society at large, and Citizens' Action's dreams of "enlightening civic consciousness" are equally significant for their creative recuperation of socialist ideals as they are for the scale of their aspirations. These aspirations once belonged to the domain of the state, which during socialism was as the ultimate seat of regulatory power. Small citizens associations of the sort I have described here do not and cannot possess such regulatory capacities. What is more, they face a disinterested, decentralized state, captured by clientelist interests, none of which align with the efforts to promote any kind of a social or political transformation. Their other apparent ally, the International Community, remains paralyzed by political inertia and uneasiness with its own crypto-imperial mission of remaking Bosnia in its own image. The only thing the IC can do is hand over the remainder of its donations to organizations in which it recognizes an orientation towards democratic politics. But if 16 years of postwar reform has taught scholars of the Balkans anything, it is that money only goes so far, and can sometimes stand in the way.

While “akcija” continues to exist as a format of civic engagement and a type of ethical disposition, it faces serious problems on the way to becoming a political technology of the sort it was during the socialist period. Take for instance the campaign by young neo-communists and the network of Tito Memorial Societies, which decided to organize the first official post-Yugoslav youth work action “Podgradci 2009.” In 2010, I interviewed one of the organizers of this event, Duško Malešević, who is a member of the Tito Society chapter in Banja Luka. Duško spoke empathically about the necessity of reviving the spirit of enterprise and action among residents of ex-Yugoslav states, and argued that work actions could be used to return people to socialism (a goal close to his own heart). Yet despite Duško’s commitment to the communist project and work action, he admitted the organizers faced many dilemmas while putting together “Podgradci 2009.”



**Figure 43:** A photo-op from Podgradci 2009, courtesy of Duško Malešević

For example, when the idea to stage a new work action arose, activists from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia had a hard time coming up with a proper public works project. They considered offering their assistance to the building a local highway, but decided against this move because the road was a pet project of the Serb nationalist leader and occasional social democrat, Milorad Dodik, who used its construction as a means of winning support and favors. Community projects were also vulnerable to cooptation by local nationalist elites. The last thing young communists wanted was to “offer their services” to the new quasi-state or nationalist interests. Finally, the group settled on helping families in the village of Podgradci to harvest their crops and work their fields. This solution was far from ideal, as many organizers debated to what extent this kind of a program went against the collectivist spirit of socialism or its orientation toward public good. Some raised questions about the individuals benefiting from the labor of young volunteers. To assuage these fears, Duško himself suggested the village of Podgradci because he knew its inhabitants, could control the situation on the ground, and execute the necessary planning. But lacking in funds to cover the lodging expenses and foods for volunteers, Duško had to turn to organizations such as Red Cross, which in the end, did not fulfill their promises.

In the end, Podgradci 2009 turned out to be a bit of a paradox: a work action lead by young neocommunist that in the end helped private individuals rather than society at large. Duško was well aware of the contradictions, but argued that the limited impact of the event had been assuaged by the media attention it received. Their small project reminded the public about

the tradition of ORAs and rendered imaginable again such forms of civic engagement. What is more, it brought together a new generation of young people, whose members were more or less committed to socialist ideals, and engaged them in a form of political pedagogy that Duško saw as absolutely necessary for going forward. Without doubt, the effect of these actions on participants was much greater than any measurable outcome of their labors. To this anthropologist, however, insights into debates behind the scenes and the way the media portrayed “the first postcommunist ORA”, only rendered more visible the impossibility of reviving work actions as a political practice of the same order. The compromises organizers had to make reminded of a painful but simple truth: that the conditions for doing a public good no longer exist in the way they once had.

Judging from the experience of Dobro, Citizen Action and the young neocommunists, the specific circumstances of the postwar period have fundamentally transformed “akcija” as a format of civic engagement. State led discipline and social engineering has given way to private initiative and self-fashioning. Targets of “akcije” shrank in size and import; their effects, especially in the case of Citizen Action, became reduced to a few minutes of media spotlight. For Citizen Action, the ambivalent successes of this tactic came to stand in for the ambivalence of their successes and failures.

### *Of fools and horses: ethics, tragedy and the burden of the future*

As this chapter draws to a somber close, I want to pose one last question: if engaging in political activism is doomed to fail, why do people pursue such paths? Or to borrow from Nais Dave (2011):, “why are activists—*activists*?”

A way of thinking about this question anew was offered to me by a friend and Citizen Action activist, Jasmina, a 46-year-old divorced, single mother. In the summer of 2009, I joined her in putting up fliers in her quarter announcing a small street action emphatically called “My neighborhood.” Jasmina, an agricultural engineer turned administrative worker in the precarious postwar economy, became involved with the 2008 spring demonstrations by sheer accident—the day the first street gatherings took place, she was heading to a different protest, organized in order to advocate for a nighttime bus line connecting the city center with the peripheral residential neighborhoods. Despite her original intentions, she became one of the most ardent participants in the Mrnjavac protests, choosing to later join the portion of her compatriots who decided to become members of this new organization, the AG.

Jasmina’s neighborhood, Dobrinja<sup>18</sup>, where we were to stage this action the following day, had become infamous in Sarajevo for a particularly devastating experience of the wartime

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<sup>18</sup> In 1992, immediately at the start of the war, Dobrinja became divided by a military frontier running through the apartment complexes, which cut a large section of Dobrinja off from the rest of the city controlled by the Bosnian army (a division that was going to continue in the after-war years, because the entity line dividing the Sarajevo canton belonging to the Muslim-Croat Federation and the post-war city of “Eastern Sarajevo” in Republika Srpska to this day runs through this very neighborhood). From then on, Dobrinja’s inhabitants effectively experienced a dual siege, coupled with severe mortar bombardment and worse-than-usual shortages of food and supplies. This experience led to a rapid formation of a wartime culture specific to the neighborhood, which allegedly included an entirely separate vocabulary for wartime “things” that differed substantially from the rest of Sarajevo wartime jargon and made certain forms of communication with the rest of the surrounded city more difficult. Dobrinja’s wartime history engendered interesting stereotypes about the people who inhabited this neighborhood: other Sarajevans often described them as the craziest, most-shell shocked, most brave and most foolish of all. In the passing of wartime years, Dobrinja became additionally stigmatized as one of the neighborhoods enduring the most dramatic transformations of its population.

siege and for now being divided by the entity border separating the so-called Serb Sarajevo from the rest of the city in the Muslim-Croat Federation. Once home to the upwardly mobile, multiethnic middle class living in prime-quality public housing, Dobrinja had in the postwar period become a place known for its dilapidated infrastructure, geographic isolation, profound demographic shifts and rise of crime.

Living amidst such materializations of the postwar “crisis,” Jasmina’s first venture into activism actually began during her tenure as the president of apartment owners’ association [*kućni savjet*] in her building. In her efforts to restore “a sense of order” and “normalcy,” she went after incompetent municipal agencies, wrote letters to officials, fought through bureaucratic walls, studied laws and regulations and made quite a few enemies among her neighbors who did not share her disdain for improper disposal of garbage, or using common lawns as private vegetable plots. Yet Jasmina herself saw these banal, everyday frustrations and struggles as a part of a much larger problem<sup>19</sup> that necessitated concrete action. This commitment to action was at the core of Jasmina’s sense of self and of her relationship to the future. Despite having held multiple positions in Citizen Action, she felt the most comfortable and most needed in the working group of *akcijaši*, the section in charge of planning street actions and concrete interventions.

Despite her forceful, no nonsense style, Jasmina was no radical; she often claimed that the chief problem with the postwar society was a lack of system [*nema sistema*]. In her everyday life and small scale-activism, she believed that certain kinds of resilience, persistence, and hard, unpleasant work, eventually could lead to change. Commenting on the insights gleaned during her previous struggles with municipal agencies, she told me that the trick was to show those on the other side that you were more stubborn—“a bigger horse” [*veći konj*]<sup>19</sup>—than them. The problem with “our people” was the fact they had no patience, and gave up after the first try. You had to tire your opposition out, make them want to get rid of you. Jasmina acknowledged that one needed to be a particular kind of a person in order to do that—smart, resourceful and with “nerves of a horse.”

And, in Jasmina’s eyes, you had to also be realistic. Within the organization, she often rejected with skepticism calls of other members to gear the group’s agenda towards bigger issues like constitutional reform and rising nationalist rhetoric, claiming she herself was only interested in the city of Sarajevo, and possibly its outskirts. This was why she devised this “action” entitled “My Neighborhood” with the idea of setting up shop at a street corner in order to talk to the residents about life’s everyday problems. The occasion would be dually useful: Citizen Action activists would get to introduce themselves to fellow citizens and possibly recruit new members, while also provide a service by recording public grievances and officially forwarding them to the municipal government.

The entire operation was as grassroots as grassroots could get: the plan was to have a few members arrive on scene after getting off work, and set up shop by using a small folding table and a couple of chairs. Jasmina herself had composed the announcement and made some thirty copies of the flier, using her printer at her place of work. I was there to help her put them up in front of building entrances, holding a roll of tape, which we cut with our teeth. We went

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<sup>19</sup> On numerous occasions, she would tell me how the core issue was the fact that today “there is no system”—a claim that appeared paradoxical in a country that had four levels of government, thirteen constitutions and 160 ministries. But Jasmina was not talking about the actual cumbersome apparatus that grew out the Dayton Agreement—she was talking about institutions whose efficaciousness could guarantee some sense of predictability and protection in everyday life.

around the neighborhood, chatting quietly, and noting the occasional staring passers by. And then somewhere near building entrance number 11, Jasmina emphatically began a monologue:

“Oh my, we are such fools!?! Aren’t we fools?!. Really. Total fools. Foolish people. Why are we doing this? We could have just as easily been doing something else. It’s a beautiful day.”

I laughed, and decided to turn her rhetorical question into a real one, asking: Why ARE “we” doing this? Really?” Responding to me with self-deprecating grin, and the self-consciousness of someone who was about to say something they weren’t certain they believed in, or feared was too naive, Jasmina said: “ Well...for a better future, I guess. Maybe something will come of it. Maybe.”

And surely, tomorrow afternoon, “something” did happen when small groups of curious residents came by our folded-out table (which as we soon discovered was broken), to tell us about drug dealers on the playground and lack of parking space, unsure of how a mixed group of middle aged and twenty something women, a dog and one tired looking husband taking photographs, could really help them.



**Figure 44:** “My Neighborhood” akcija

That evening I sat in the back of a trolley bus thinking about what Jasmina had actually said to me, in equating the figure of an activist, with that of a fool. In the socio-political matrix of postwar Bosnia, Jasmina and her fellow activists were seen as a part of the minority willing to openly agitate, organize and work to produce a more desirable future. Their effort counteracted the widespread sense of resignation and despair. Yet in cynically dismissing her efforts as foolish and likely done in vain, Jasmina professed a particular kind of uncertainty which cast doubt on both the efficaciousness of her intentions and her capacities to be that kind of an actor in the world who is capable of remaking it. She also inadvertently problematized the notion that challenging the status quo, and working to change the future, was logical and normal. Like others I spoke to before and after our encounter, she told me that in opting to join the revolt, the new citizen activists had in fact become strange in their historico-political context and somehow

taken on a type of political and historical subjectivity for which there was little use, and which was possibly quite self destructive. In other words, Jasmina identified herself and her agency as ultimately tragic due to the incommensurability of her intentions and the lived experience on which she was basing her expectations (see Scott 2008).

Importantly, while Jasmina affirmed in this way the importance of action for its own sake, she did so not in order to glorify individual autonomy or to make herself into a hero, but in order to propose that what mattered more than outcomes was becoming and remaining a particular kind of person, even if that person was a fool. As I thought about Jasmina's words, I remembered an earlier conversation with Sasha, another participant in the protests in his late thirties, who told me once during a meeting:

“Do you think I am doing this because I believe I am going to change something!? I am doing it because someday, when my kid asks me: ‘why is everything so fucked up?’ I will be able to say: ‘I tried.’”

In framing his activism not so much in terms of a certain political outcome –but quite directly in terms of probable failure—Sasha posited a different relationship of his present actions to the future, framed in terms of his bond with and responsibility to his daughter. In that hypothetical future, which will most likely remain unchanged if not become worse, actual outcome, actual capacity of his activism to call into being measurable change will not be as important as his intention and willingness to act. In this way, Sasha took further what Jasmina hinted at in her uneasy deployment of the phrase “a better future.” She too was strongly motivated by being a parent, and feeling a sense of responsibility for the future her son was going to inhabit. Jasmina's and Sasha's roles as parents further intensified my sense of their actions being embedded within a field of social relations, placing them further away from languages of autonomy and freedom. Their political aspirations and the actions these aspirations inspired made know limits of political action rather than their capacity to transform the world. Caught between the withdrawing horizons of the present, and conjuring images of a future unchanged, they saw productive capacity of their commitments not so much in their uncertain and limited effects, but in the way they helped them become and remain particular kinds of people, those who act in the world even when acting is foolish and ineffectual.

### *The things that cannot be fixed*

Marxian philosophy, socialist ideology and the political projects they inspired, promoted a vision of the human as a historical agent, capable of transforming her circumstances pending the development of the individual and collective consciousness that would recognize her inferior status and exploitative relationships with the system. By 2009, such theoretical arguments and the forms of politics they inspired seemed inadequate, dated and perhaps terribly naïve, especially in the case of postsocialist and postwar Bosnia where neither consciousness of one's circumstance nor concrete actions seemed to carry enough transformative potential.

During the socialist era in Yugoslavia, the notion of action which was embedded in the ethos of the worker's brigades served to inspire the exercise of human power over the environment, an exercise that would create material proof of socialism's vigor and legitimacy. Yet, work actions were to also through praxis create proper socialist persons, as evidenced in the popular phrase: “We are building the railroad, the railroad is building us.” But when railroads,

along the confidence in the capacity of politics to build them, disappeared, what remained of that socialist ethos was the idea one could through action become a particular type of a person.

In her work on queer activists in India, Nais Dave conceptualizes political activism as a form of ethical practice, which emerges in the encounter between previously established norms, their problematization and creative invention of alternatives to them (Dave 2011, 3). In my discussion of “akcija,” I too have spoken of activism as a practice cultivation of ethical personhood that seeks to provide an alternative way of inhabiting the impasse. My accent on cultivation is meant to index the proscriptive nature of these reconfigured norms, but also the fact activists continually engage with them, reinvent them and improve their own mastery and understanding through practice as well as the work of reflection (see Pandian 2009; Hirschkind 2006; also Lamback 2010).

I want to suggest that what is at stake for Jasmina and Sasha and many of my informants, is at least in part, a commitment to a certain ethical project, a way of being in the world, where one’s intention matters precisely because it has no real political currency. Such forms of intentionality, as I have shown here, have the capacity to generate unique bonds of solidarity and a sense of a shared project, even among people who seem to have little in common.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the trope of the revolution (with which this dissertation begins) despite its chimerical and floating character, reveals something much larger and more important about the forms of political aspiration and of hope, than the ways in which its illusory nature folds into already existent narratives of Bosnian failures. In waiting (for the International intervention or for Revolution), all that one can hope to do is to elect how to live within the possibilities and constrains of one’s situation.

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<sup>20</sup> The famous critique of John Austin’s understanding of the performative capacities of language by Jacques Derrida (1988) argues for the primacy of the context rather than intention for understanding of outcomes of different speech acts. Yet what remains unconsidered is the meaning, value and the effect of those forms of intentionality which seem unable to produce desired outcomes. I have argued here that such intentions matter at a different level, and are productive of subjectivities and forms of sociality, which may be able to generate unplanned effects.



## CH 6 ACTIVISM AS PLAY: DEEP PARODY, POLITICAL HUMOR AND PERFORMANCE IN THE TIMES OF IMPASSE

In the early morning hours of January 10, 2009, Nedžad Branković, the Bosniak nationalist politician who at that time held the appointment of the Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, discovered on the wall of his apartment building two graffiti. Allegedly, the graffiti made no explicit mention of his name, but simply stated: "Hey, you crook, return the apartment!" [*Lopove, vrati stan*] and "In accordance with the law you got the apartment, in accordance with the law you are going to the joint!" [*Po zakonu si dobio stan, po zakonu češ i u ćuzu*] (Arnautović 2009). The appearance of these graffiti warnings—whose context of emergence I analyze in this chapter—produced an unlikely series of responses by political activists and the various members of the Bosnian public.

In the aftermath of the "incident," around four thousands "ordinary" citizens, political activists, members of the Opposition, artists and intellectuals publicly *confessed* to (also) being the authors of the graffiti, some going so far as to show up at their local police stations to declare their "guilt" (Fetahović 2009, 2). In the second stage of the campaign, activists made use of funds collected from sympathetic citizens and the parodic tactics of overidentification (Žižek 1993; Yurchak 1999; 2006; Boyer and Yurchak 2010), to produce a series of billboards that looked remarkably similar to commercial advertisements for a real estate agency offering incredible deals on apartments. The billboards called out both to the government elites and to the Bosnian public at large, offering a much more subtle and effective form of criticism from direct condemnation of the nationalist regime or its corruption. In the process, both phases of the campaign brought into being new publics, new forms of solidarity and new ideas about what it meant to do political activism in postwar Bosnia.

This unusual graffiti campaign presented just one in a series of aesthetic and political interventions put together by Bosnian activists during my 2008-2009 fieldwork. Among the groups experimenting with such novel forms of political critique, Citizen Action proved to be the most creative and the most prolific. This final chapter, in addition to the activist interventions inspired by the Branković graffiti incident, analyzes several other campaigns that made use of experimental tactics, provocations, political satire, overidentification and puppetry. I examine these distinctive strategies as reformulations of the (post)socialist *aesthetics of the absurd*, linking contemporary styles of political intervention to their socialist era precedents. However, I also show how the re-orientation towards such styles of engagement and indeed, their very transformation into an overt political tactic, is a product of a new ideological terrain and of a new kind of "postsocialist" political consciousness.

This process of remediation of socialist era forms has special significance because twenty years after the beginning of the war, Bosnia-Herzegovina still offers a unique challenge to studies of post-1989 political transformations in the 'new Europe.' As I have so far argued, the enormity of the war and the extent of international involvement in the processes of postwar "democratization" (see Coles 2007, also Greenberg 2009) has obscured the analytical importance of Bosnia's socialist experience as an interpretive context for ongoing political transformations. Hence, most of research about citizen engagement has remained trapped in the seemingly neutral language of civil society, postwar reconciliation and participatory citizenship (c.f. Jansen 2006), ignoring the distinct sensibilities that often shape Bosnians' attitudes towards politics at large.

Activists' experimentation brings into foreground historical underpinnings of contemporary modes and practices of political engagement.

What is more, the turn to aesthetic, parodic and embodied forms of play among Bosnian activists shows that political stalemates, such as the one that followed the end of the war in Bosnia, do not simply impede political engagement, but generate new possibilities for political critique. In turn, such modes of innovation provide productive sites for exploring the very conditions under which one can (or cannot) politically participate in states nominally described as democracies, but where conditions for such participation have been overdetermined and sometimes even violently foreclosed. In a frail, fragmented and increasingly withdrawn Bosnian state, activists use humor and parody to bring this disappearing state into being. In doing so, they show how some forms of activist critique can be motivated by the fear of absence of (rather than resistance to) an overarching regulating authority.

The layout of the chapter begins with the graffiti incident, which I first contextualize with reference to the past uses of deep parody for political criticism in Former Yugoslavia, and especially Bosnia. After a thorough analysis of the graffiti campaign, I examine a series of performances and street actions involving the "heads"—the grotesque replicas of the leading Bosnian politicians, religious leaders and an occasional foreign emissary, which Citizen Action used in its street actions and provocations. I show how the experimentation with these props did not simply aim at the exposure of the corrupt, immoral or grotesque nature of postwar authorities, but helped reveal the mutual implication between the political elites, the activists and society at large. I end by pondering what happens to both activism and ethnography, when the anthropologist crosses over, and takes on the role of an activist.

### *A postsocialist aesthetics of the absurd*

How does something like the graffiti incident and the row of "fake" confessions with which I began this chapter become possible in postwar Bosnia? Under what circumstances do activists start to rely on "deep parody" as supposed to any other approach? And what light can activists' experimentation cast on the problems of political demobilization and social apathy, which so often emerge in the public discourse and policy analyses as the main ailments affecting the "troubled" postwar state?

The rise of deep parody as a political strategy is made possible by at least three interconnected factors: 1) the over-determining effect of the political deadlock, which renders useless any direct criticism of the government; 2) the legacy of political parody and satire from the late socialist period, which has left a deep imprint on the present-day political imagination and 3) the centrality of humor and *zajebancija* (good fun) to sociality more broadly.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the contemporary situation in postwar Bosnia bears the mark of an irresolvable impasse, one that helps render superfluous conventional activist strategies (as well as makes necessary particular forms of accommodation and disengagement). Because ethnic conflict has been built into the very infrastructure of the state, making nationalist ideology both concrete and hegemonic, citizens of Bosnia by and large experience the present political situation in terms of an insurmountable paralysis that is difficult if not impossible to challenge. This does not mean that Bosnian society remains frozen in time; to the contrary, the impasse necessitates various creative responses to what often seem like bizarre and absurd situations (for instance, see CH 3). Nevertheless, since the post-Dayton

regime itself appears immutable and paralyzing, doubts weigh down each and every promise of meaningful political change.<sup>1</sup> Those seeking to intervene, as in the case of Citizen Action, are not immune to such skepticism either, yet must constantly devise new ways of staging such interventions.

Under such overdetermined conditions, conventional forms of criticism (and activism) focused on unmasking “the truth,” “speaking truth to power” or directly, earnestly critiquing moral deficits of officials, usually fail not only to produce desired results but tend to be ignored or dismissed by the public.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, most Bosnians already see politics as synonymous with corruption, nepotism, mediocrity, immorality, and usually view politicians as lacking in skills, creativity and initiative (see Helms 2007). To “expose” politicians as such problematic, corrupt agents, equals stating the obvious. Secondly, Bosnian public, especially citizens residing in the Federation, is relatively well informed about various political and economic scandals. As I’ve suggested in the introduction, the very circulation of that information adds to and itself produces the overwhelming sense of worry and anxiety about the present and the future.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as long as incriminating information has the status of a “public secret,” anticorruption and transparency initiatives simply compound existing knowledge about the very nature of post-Dayton government and its micro-operations. What’s more, as I show in the second chapter, this knowledge comes of limited use when citizens themselves become enveloped by this political context, which forces them, one way or another, into its gripping net.<sup>4</sup> The checks and balances system, practices of “whistle blowing,” even media exposes more often than not fail to meaningfully mobilize. This apparent inadequacy of standard forms of critique also necessitates new styles of intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this language of immutability from Alexei Yurchak’s analysis of late socialist transformations in the Soviet Union (see especially Yurchak 2006), even though I am using the term in a slightly different manner. Yurchak argues that the experience of the Soviet state as eternal and immutable was produced through the hypernormalization of authoritative discourse of the Communist Party. Because this discourse became entirely self-referential, highly repetitive and in some ways “frozen,” it took on a largely *performative* function, helping reproduce Soviet institutions but creating a distance between this state and its citizens. This distance not only enabled the proliferation of alternative forms of life and thinking (at sites that Yurchak calls “deterritorialized milieus”), but also helped prepare Soviet citizens for the fall of socialism. Yurchak calls this transformation the *performative shift*. While nationalist discourse in Bosnia certainly bears some resemblance to the socialist era rhetoric (especially since it seeks to trap all political grievances and claims, regardless of their aims or ideological content), its reproduction in Bosnia is far more diffused and less formalized, due in part to the plurality of political authorities. Nevertheless, I am arguing that the nature of this diffusion and the over-determining effect of nationalist frames produces a sense of paralysis which helps entrench both the political authorities and new symbolic order.

<sup>2</sup> However, this “speaking truth to power” model—while recognized as inefficacious and as inevitably leading to disappointment—hasn’t been completely abandoned. As I have shown in the previous chapter, some of my interlocutors continue to see earnest forms of activist intervention as a condition of possibility for certain forms of ethical life that have to do, in particular, with intergenerational responsibilities (i.e. I must do this, so that I can face my children, even though I have no hope it will be successful).

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the unique nature of the national media space, which is not so much independent as it is partisan and made client to various political parties and national camps, citizens are continually being informed about corruption, irresponsibility and failures of their political leadership. Between 2008 and 2009, the enormously popular show *60 Minutes*, broadcast weekly exposés on the dealings of local and state level politicians, newly minted “businessmen” and employees in various state and even religious institutions. Despite being shown on Sarajevo-based Federal Television, *60 Minutes* attained great popularity across Bosnia-Herzegovina. For example, weekly public screenings took place on the campus of University of Banja Luka, in the café-restaurant frequented by students and other city inhabitants. The host of the show, Bakir Hadžimerović, who on multiple occasions received serious threats, achieved enormous popularity and trust among his audiences. This popularity lasted until 2010, when his suspected ties to the Opposition—namely the Social Democratic Party—became both obvious and a subject to intense criticism.

<sup>4</sup> Transparency and anticorruption initiatives, in my view, fail to take into account that the problem in Bosnia is not the lack of information or awareness of corruption, but indeed, the ways in which practices deemed as corrupt or the very clientelist model of local power, come to define social, political and economic existence. When faced with certain choices and situations, people will more likely choose to play according to the (in)formal rules of the system, rather than question or resist them.

In the second place, the forms of indirect ideological critique, well demonstrated in the concerted attack on Branković following the “graffiti scandal,” have roots in late socialist genres of political humor, which in the (post)Soviet context, carry the name *stiob*. *Stiob* is “a parodic style based on overidentification, [which] usually involves such precise mimicry of the object of one’s irony that it is often impossible to tell whether this is a form of sincere support or subtle ridicule, or both” (Boyer and Yurchak 2010, 185). *Stiob* aesthetics [purportedly] thrives under the conditions where authoritative discourse seems overformalized to the point of caricature (182). In such contexts, “[s]ince any straightforward criticism of the seemingly “unchangeable” regime smack[s] not only of political activism but of banality and lack of taste as well, one type of *stiob* mask[s] itself as ideology’s eager supporter” (Yurchak 1999, 84).

Although the term was never used in Serbo-Croat, *stiob*-like genres, overidentification, as well as other related forms of parody, also thrived during late socialism in Yugoslavia. Importantly, however, their use remained limited to groups of artists and creative producers. Sarajevo based collective of actors, musicians and provocateurs that would become known as “New Primitivs” or simply “The Surrealists” (*Nadrealisti*) made extensive use of such tactics during their popular show “Top List of the Surrealists.”<sup>5</sup> Keenly recognizing, and partly also cherishing the various contradictions of Yugoslav society, New Primitivs *over-identified* with the actual traditionalists, simple-minded peasants, parochial intellectuals, confused journalists, frustrated factory managers, paranoid police officers, and other socialist-era apparatchiks, often taking these people’s scripts to the extreme, in order to expose their absurdity. Faced with a rapid growth of nationalist rhetoric, the Surrealists devised a series of sketches, in which they poked fun at linguists devising absurd theses in the service of nationalism, or imagined such “preposterous” scenarios as a Sarajevo divided by a wall, ethnically segregated kindergarten classrooms, or families waging wars over their living rooms and in the name of political disagreements—many of which turned out to be prophetic. Ironically, the collective fell apart at the start of the Bosnian war, because of its internal political differences and fraught dynamics (the details of which remain outside of the scope of this chapter). However, their strategies, sense of humor and the aesthetic orientations profoundly shaped the sensibilities of several generations of Bosnians—including those of the activists whose work I describe here.<sup>6</sup>

Sarajevo Surrealists, as unique and important as they were to late socialist culture in Yugoslavia, were also seen from the beginning as a quintessentially Bosnian phenomenon, one whose emergence depended on the unique cultural milieu of 1980s Sarajevo, its forms of sociality and networks of friendship. This context is important both for understanding the role of the Surrealists in the political and ideological imaginary as well as contemporary activists’ affinity for the distinct improvisational style of this troupe. For one, the Surrealists and the activists’ interest in the subversive capacities of satire, performance and parody echoes the established centrality of humor, joke telling and the “lampooning of self and others” to being Bosnian (Vučetić 2004, 7). Such a regional, and frequently ethnically marked stereotype often relies on paradoxical representations of the figure of the Bosnian as wise or sly trickster, as an aggressive, deeply conservative and sexually promiscuous person or a fool lacking common sense or capacity for abstract thinking. Indeed, in the context of former Yugoslavia, Bosnians are not only the “great raconteurs and connoisseurs of jokes” (7), but also frequently the objects

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<sup>5</sup> For a film scholar’s take on the Surrealists, see Levi 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Darjan and Dejan—my two key ethnographic interlocutors in this chapter—often mentioned and made recourse to the Surrealists, in part because of the prophetic nature of their improvisation and sketches. Darjan, as I already mentioned in Chapter Three, often says “our entire lives are already in the Surrealists.”

of these jokes, sometimes ironically made so by self-deprecating Bosnians themselves. “New Primitivs” choose to embody this stereotype, becoming a more perfect copy of the very representation that provides an overdetermined, stifling understanding of Bosnianness. In eagerly embracing, that is overidentifying, with the clever, sly, but also not too bright, sophisticated nor enlightened (“new primitivs”) Bosnian, they were also actively undermining the very set of discursive formulations on which that stereotype depended. Similarly, their enormous popularity throughout Yugoslavia, at once served as a self-fulfilling prophecy of the regional stereotype, and the ultimate negation its injurious, demeaning and profoundly limiting representation of Bosnians as “dim fools.”

By electing witty satire, improvisation and overidentification as their favorite tactics, the Surrealists also challenged the dominance of the so-called ethnic jokes, which though popular and widely circulating, comprise only one genre of humor in the region. In fact, in certain contexts, such jokes can be seen as overtly explicit, potentially too cheap or lowbrow and perhaps also the least interesting style of “joking around.” By contrast, Sarajevans valorize the effective use of humor as a means of producing *dobra zajebancija* (good fun—literally “screwing around, but in a quality manner”). Such practices and norms of sociality involve not so much the retelling of jokes or the deployment of familiar stereotypes,<sup>7</sup> but demand clever improvisations and decontextualizations, sharp and humorous observations and hyperbolic mimicry, as well as the usual display of a self-deprecating capacity. To use Vučetić’s language again, to learn to lampoon as well as be lampooned forms a crucial aspect of socialization, of learning how to be Sarajevan and Bosnian. Often *zajebancije* take a dark and fatalistic tone, reflective of a distinct structure of affect that approaches the world presuming that things can always get worse and are unlikely to get better.

While certainly a longstanding part of everyday life, this fatalistic sense of humor has been further bolstered by the experience of the war, particularly the siege of Sarajevo, during which residents found themselves living various absurd scenarios. Consequently, when Sarajevans speak of the war today among each other, they rarely focus on the fear, death or suffering, but instead share bizarre, absurd and wickedly funny moments about their attempts to survive and make do. Such moments of narrating the war through humor often produce mountains of hysterical laughter and tears, solidifying the sense of *communitas* among those present, and helping them instantly recognize each other as a part of the same collective. Outsiders are rarely made privy to such conversations among survivors (who tend to shift footing in the presence of non-Sarajevans and usually attempt to teach their listeners about the “realities” of the siege). Other times, circles of friends sit around recounting each other’s mistakes, mishaps and missteps, which took place in a particularly bizarre or entertaining situation. Sometimes, such moments of *zajebancija* spontaneously turn to practical jokes. Irrespectively of the variety of its forms, however, *zajebancija* is a social practice that relies on a shared affect, situated, detailed knowledge and intimate experience to deepen a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Members of Citizen Action composed first and foremost, a group of friends—one that had its own specific ideas about what constituted both “proper, smart activism” and “good fun.” Their experiments with performative strategies were on the most basic level, a type of *zajebancija*. In private conversations, pursuing such experiments amounted to the call to “screw

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<sup>7</sup> Therefore, such forms of sociality are to be distinguished from Soviet era practices of telling *anekdoty* (see Yurchak 1997, 2005, also see Ries 1997), which were formulaic, without a clear author and often told repeatedly. However, the circulation of *anekdoty* and the practices of “reeling (them) out” became an important social ritual during late socialism, central to the norms of sociality and performing of a normative positionality of *svoi* (Yurchak 2005 273-6, also 102-114).

around” or “devise provocations” (*Hajmo praviti pizdarije!*) Such foul language and apparent lack of seriousness helped anchor extraordinary, at times brave and foolish acts of *political* intervention, in the language of the ordinary and the everyday. To call activism a *zajebancija*, means not simply to acknowledge (as in the previous chapter) its Sisyphean nature, but to also domesticate a set of potentially slippery activist strategies, and in so doing transform them through language into a constitutive aspect of a way of life. As a consequence, playful experimentation had the effect of situating, perhaps even legitimating the activists’ efforts in the cultural milieu of postwar Sarajevo. What is more, such performances contributed to the internal consolidation of the organization and the bonding of its members. To make sense of the post-graffiti campaign, and other provocations that I analyze here, this productive aspect of playfulness must not be thought of as an accidental byproduct, but crucial aspect and goal of the performative interventions.

### *A tale of two graffiti and one very cheap apartment*

The infamous graffiti offered one concrete instantiation of the rising discontent with the political elites and the postwar “crisis,” which characterized much of my fieldwork in Bosnia between 2008 and 2009.<sup>8</sup> Branković took the office of the Prime Minister in 2007, but due to various investigations into suspicious financial deals during his tenure as an executive of several state-owned enterprises, his name had soon become synonymous with a “shameless” [*beskrupulozan*] quest for personal gain, incompetence and insolence characteristic of a new generation of nationalist politicians.<sup>9</sup> The list of Branković’s suspected illegal dealings during the time of his directorships of the BH Railways and Energoinvest is a long one, and it includes various unlawful business contracts with favored clientelist enterprises, instances of decision and profit making while under blatant conflict of interest, illegal privatization and so on (e.g. *Biznis.ba* 2007, Terzić 2008).

As the economic situation in the country deteriorated throughout 2008, Branković’s government also came under severe attack for its failure to realize over half of its planned program while managing to create a budget deficit whose estimates ranged between 150 million (Ferhatović & Borić 2009) to 500 million Euros (Mujkić 2009, 14). In early 2009, as the effects of the global economic recession began to reverberate in the Bosnian economy, the federal government announced its coffers were empty. The budget deficit seemed to many analysts simply the end product of an irresponsible and politically motivated increase in social spending, inspired by the need to buy public support and votes on the eve of the 2006 election (Bečirović 2009, 2009i). The special beneficiaries of these extensions were the war veterans and their families—the claimants whose numbers mysteriously continued to grow even 15 years after the end of the war. These groups were also the most loyal and vehement supporters of Branković’s

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<sup>8</sup> It may be worth noting that the graffiti incident followed the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis, which left much of Europe without a source of winter heating, and forced Western European governments to empty out their emergency reservoirs in order to ensure their citizens would not freeze in the grueling January temperatures. By contrast, since Bosnia had no such reserves nor a contingency plan (another sign of neglect!), many citizens of Sarajevo and other cities dependant on natural gas, found themselves in a situation reminiscent of the wartime: sitting and despairing in freezing apartments. Obviously, this situation did not help the government’s popularity.

<sup>9</sup> In 2009, Branković and then Prime Minister of the Federation, Edhem Bičakčić (who already served time because of misuse of public funds), were officially brought to court on charges of misuse of public coffers (*Sofradžija* 2009). Meanwhile new information surfaced about Branković’s house in the elite new suburb of Poljine in Sarajevo, which was not properly registered in the cadastral books (*CIN* 2008).

party, the Bosniak nationalist SDA.

Yet amidst the sea of indictments and accusations, one story about this deeply unpopular politician gained special traction. In 2007, as a part of its investigation into private real estate purchases made with public money, the Center for Investigative Reporting in Sarajevo pursued the seven-year-old rumor that Branković (who had been working in 2000 in dual capacity as an appointed official and one of the directors a crumbling giant Energoinvest) acquired his apartment through unethical and possibly illegal conduct. By early September, they published a report chronicling how the future Prime Minister, with the help of his party colleagues and roughly 125 000 Euros of budgetary funds, managed to become an owner of a large, luxury apartment in the Ciglane neighborhood by paying some 460 Euros (CIN 2007).<sup>10</sup> When pressed by the journalists to answer how such an apartment could be purchased with little fuss and such expediency for so little, Branković professed that he did not remember the details, but that everything was done "in accordance with the law" [*po zakonu*]. The catchy phrase "po zakonu" subsequently became a running joke among journalists, activists and disgruntled citizens, finally landing a spot in the accusatory graffiti in front of Prime Minister's home.<sup>11</sup>

The use of this key phrase—and *perhaps* a "guilty conscience" (see Althusser 1971; Butler 1997)—made the scandalous graffiti call successful and helped implicate the Prime Minister in a new relationship with the public. After the police responded slowly to Branković's distraught calls, he wrote letters to the President and various ministries, complaining about the lack of institutional support for securing the safety of his family (Fena 2009). He alleged that the attack of the "hooligans" created an atmosphere in which it was impossible to do Prime Minister's job. Finally, he demanded an urgent meeting of the ministerial cabinet and announced (as several times before) that he was considering resigning from his post.

Instead of generating sympathy for the Prime Minister, the subsequent publication of these letters in the daily papers exploded public support for the unknown author(s) of the graffiti. Incised by Branković's arrogant and oblivious tone,<sup>12</sup> Citizen Action published a counter-statement to Branković's letter, entitled "No one paid us, we wrote that graffiti for free"<sup>13</sup> (Udruženje Akcija Građana 2009). Framed a passionate *confession* to the "crime," the PR statement (especially its first paragraph) at the first glance appeared to be a genuine admission of

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<sup>10</sup> The apartment—whose purchasing value was just over 260 000 BAM—was paid for by the Federal government, which formed an agreement with the firm of Energoinvest that it would participate in the resolution of Branković's need for a place of residency (stambeno pitanje). At that time, Branković was both an appointed official and a high-ranking executive of Energoinvest.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, several months before the graffiti scandal, the movement DOSTA, which I discuss in later parts of this paper, was actively building a campaign against Branković because of the corruption scandals and failures of his government to address problems arising from the economic crisis. Yet, according to Darko Brkan, one of the most prominent activists of the movement, its people did not write the graffiti. He suspected—but only suspected—that the deed might have been done by much younger, and still nascent antifascist group in Sarajevo.

<sup>12</sup> On numerous occasions, both during informal field interviews and on online forums and news comments, I learned that many people thought that Branković's facial expression testified to his moral corruption. Spotting a cynical smile, paired with vacuous rhetoric and an air of entitlement and pompousness, Branković was viscerally disliked and openly called "a little crook." Some also derided his provincial origin and the concomitant desire for power and recognition, politically motivated wartime honors, and appropriation of all the credit for the construction of the "Tunnel of Hope" (an underground passage, which during the Siege of Sarajevo provided a lifeline for food for the residents of the city, as well as a channel for unscrupulous smugglers and war profiteers). This arrogance came to surface for me in reading a newspaper quote offered by him as a response to the controversy surrounding his apartment: "Don't I, as a former veteran rewarded with a Gold Fleur-de-Lis, as a director of one, and then another firm, a minister, and finally a PhD, have the right to secure a permanent residence for myself and my children?" (Oslobodenje, Jan 25, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Given the level of public mistrust in the formal NGO sector, engineered through foreign donations in the course of the international intervention and postwar rebuilding, the activists claim they confessed for free carried multiple messages about the odd form of sincerity on which their fake confession was based. I say more about discourses on civil society and the concept of sincerity in later parts of this paper.

fault written in somewhat hyperbolic language, characteristic of stioib-like eager and enthusiastic overidentification with authoritative discourse (Yurchak 1999; 2006; 2008; 2011). Yet as the letter went on, its tone became at once more directly critical, but also stranger and less transparent. The organization, somewhat didactically offered that “if this graffiti is the reason for the (long-awaited) assessment of the security situation, since those various awful and tragic (recent) events were not, we must all ask ourselves where are we living and whether one graffiti is more important from all of us who have been the prisoners of this regime for many years?”<sup>14</sup> (Udruženje Akcija Građana 2009).

Such a reprimand functioned on multiple levels, because it parodied the Prime Minister’s dramatic reaction and his belated but newly enlightened observations about the security situation in the capital city (that ‘incidentally,’ also formed the locus of civic mobilization since 2008). Yet it also seemed to use the frame of confession to take credit for inspiring the Prime Minister to make a change of emphasis, and in that way, help open up a political space for the group’s own agenda.<sup>15</sup> The criticism activists offered to the government went in line with their usual rhetoric; despite the dramatic language, one could argue that there was nothing satirical in the stated list of grievances. In the following paragraphs, Citizen Action made mention of Branković’s fifteen existing indictments, and asked him to give five reasons why he should stay in his current appointment. At the end, activists asked the citizens to also take responsibility for the graffiti, and in this way, “inspire” the government to action against deteriorating security on the streets.

Soon after, the online edition of the major daily *Dnevni Avaz* published a news article announcing that Citizen Action had come out to take responsibility for authoring of the graffiti in front of Prime Minister’s home (Avaz 2009). *Avaz*’s journalists took the “confession” at face value, possibly having been confused by the transparent points of criticism offered by the activists in the second half of the letter.<sup>16</sup> They also announced that the police was opening investigation into the organization. Meanwhile, the online commentators offered unequivocal, if equally oblivious support and admiration for the newly discovered “authors” of the graffiti, claiming that Branković got what he reserved. After all, the author of the graffiti only expressed the majority opinion: that the Prime Minister was incompetent, unaware of the situation in his principality and should resign if he was not ready to offer solutions.

### *Lunch Break Activism: Citizen Action and Few Thousand Other “Guilty” Souls*

Through these remarkable developments, Citizen Action, an atypical civic association in postwar Bosnia, found itself again at the center of an unusual political vortex. As I describe in the previous chapters, following a strong of protests inspired by the murder of Denis Mrnjavac, a fraction of participants decided in the summer of 2008 to continue their work in a different form. When I arrived to the field in June 2008, various ideological currents fought over whether such an organization should be a formally registered NGO. A compromise allowed those individuals

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<sup>14</sup> The translation is mine, and slightly adjusted in order to make the claims more accessible to an Anglophone audience. The original text states: “Ukoliko je grafit razlog za procjenjivanje sigurnosne situacije, a to nisu bili razni nemili i nadasve tragični događaji moramo se svi upitati gdje živimo i da li je jedan grafit bitniji od svih nas koji smo ovolike godine taoci vlasti.” Here regime (vlast) stands not for a single administration but for the Dayton established “system” and warmongering elites in general.

<sup>15</sup> In that sense, this confession was rather, a hopeful admission of responsibility for the Prime Minister’s “change of heart.”

<sup>16</sup> Dejan Menges told me, in a recent email exchange, that *Dnevni Avaz* (possibly out of embarrassment) never published this article in the printed version of the paper. The link from which I obtained the text in 2009 is also now defunct.



who favored informality to remain affiliated with the newly registered organization, and continue to organize more creative, artistic and jocular forms of political intervention that had been a significant part of the 2008 protests. Yet despite these passionate discussions, in practice, the line between the advocates of informality and formalization was never set in stone, and the registered organization continued to stage various kinds of experimental and artistic interventions throughout late 2008 and 2009. Formally, the organization's mission focused on the issue of governmental accountability, with its first project concentrating on problems of juvenile crime, reform of legal system and implementation a long promised action plan for the prevention and sanction of youth "delinquency." In practical terms, however, many other issues, including corruption and incompetence of government workers, remained of interest to organization's members.

At times, but not always, preferences for certain styles of political action seemed to map onto differences between generations. With a membership composed out of a motley crew of young professionals, single mothers, middle-aged economists, auditors and lawyers, former anarchists and underage but enthusiastic youth, Citizen Action offered a veritable medley of political and ideological positions that made it extremely unique on the landscape of civic organizations in postwar Bosnia. Its exceptional grassroots energies, passionate attachments of its members to each other (as well as tendencies for fervent disagreements which often went hand in hand with such intimacy) and lack of distinct ideological orientation, all contributed to the unconventional approach to activist practice. Such moments of experimentation, as I discuss in the previous chapter, took place under the banner of "akcija"—street actions and provocations, improvised, last minute interventions, which transpired during the members' midday lunch breaks.

As non-professionalized activists, suspicious both of political parties and other formally registered civil society organizations, members of Citizen Action inhabited a strange position on the Sarajevo political landscape. Some aspects of their situation were quite enabling of experimentation, in so far that the organization had a sense of autonomy and some degree of flexibility because most of its members were fully employed in non-state enterprises and led, according to their own words, "situated" lives.<sup>17</sup> But as opinionated non-professionals with a strong sense of ethical commitment, members of Citizen Action, would often spend a lot of time deliberating and had a hard time making political and strategic compromises. Finally, some were more adventurous than others; for example, upon learning in the *Avaz* article that the police was commencing an investigation into Citizen Action, Jasmina, a single-mother in her late forties making a living as an office assistant, spent a sleepless night in her apartment in the company of a bottle of scotch, expecting to be visited by the police (which thankfully, never showed up).

Like a number of previous and many future "actions," the fake confession to the authoring of the graffiti betrayed a more playful sensibility particularly advocated by younger fractions of the group. While the older members of the organization frequently enjoyed, supported and participated in such strategies, thirty-something-year-olds in the bunch had a particular flair for such tactics. The 2008 protests brought together a number of designers, artists, and creative producers, who created signs, fliers, stickers and other political paraphernalia in a similarly ironic key. The formal organization continued to make use of both this talent and such strategies, even if doubts persisted over how to organize their execution or measure their efficacy.

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<sup>17</sup> Yet, a few of its members had to avoid public appearances, and direct associations with certain campaigns because of fear of loss of employment.

However, on a few occasions, for Citizen Action, experimentation proved visibly efficacious, both because and in spite of the activists' intentions. The very confession to the graffiti authorship had been written as an *ad hoc* reaction by one of the organization's young officers, Darjan Bilić, and sent it to the media quickly, without extensive deliberation among the rest of members. Darjan, and another activist, Dejan Menges, who was informally affiliated both with Citizen Action and local activist movement Dosta (Enough),<sup>18</sup> discussed the news of the graffiti via Gtalk while sitting on their lunch breaks, and came up with a strategy of confessing to the crime, in part simply because they thought it would be clever and amusing.

Dejan, a computer programmer in his late twenties and a committed political activist in his own right, put together another "ironic" letter, confessing "he *too* was the hooligan who wrote the graffiti on the Prime Minister's wall." The letter deployed a remarkably similar tone to the PR statement of Citizen Action, using subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ridicule combined with reprimanding criticism.

"In these last few days, we've witnessed an attempt to divert the public's attention from the real problems in our society on behalf of the corrupted, incompetent and criminalized Prime Minister of the Federation, Nedžad Branković who... recognized himself in a graffiti....

Mr. Branković, gentlemen from all possible police administrations<sup>19</sup> in Bosnia-Herzegovina, gentlemen prosecutors, we want to help you to solve this problem, so that you could as quickly as possible return to ... real problems, particularly pursuing at least one of the fifteen indictments against Nedžad Branković...so much so, that we will admit ...who's the *real* hooligan who wrote the graffiti on the wall of the building where the Prime Minister lives." (email correspondence, via Citizen Action list, January 14, 2009, translation mine, emphasis mine)

The letter explicitly addressed the police and the prosecutor, paradoxically offering both help and criticism, both sincerity and ridicule. Despite occasional slips—that is, the absence of full-fledged commitment to the subtle rhetoric of overidentification—the letter nevertheless produced remarkable results. First, Dejan himself sent the letter to the local police station, and soon after, opened a Facebook group under the same name, whose membership mushroomed to over 3000 in a space of a few hours. Many of these online activists printed Dejan's letter and sent in or emailed their own confessions to the police. Some went as far as calling their local police stations or showing up there to "confess" to the authorship of the graffiti (author interviews 2009, 2011). A range of public personalities, including prominent writers and intellectuals, members of the Social Democratic Party and liberal party "Naša Stranka", went on

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<sup>18</sup> The very relationship between DOSTA and Citizen Action is worth elaborating in a footnote. DOSTA is a shifty and constantly changing group, without formal structure, ideology or leadership, which has been in emergence and flux since 2004. The translation of its name ("Enough") reminds of the Serbian movement Otpor (Resistance), which was instrumental in bringing down Milošević's regime. In fact, Dosta has ties with the activist networks produced by the Serbian uprising, predicated on political ideals and strategies of Gene Sharp, and is speculated to have ties with NED and various other global initiatives for promotion of "regime change." Its most prominent members, who are among the most recognizable and seasoned political activists, also run the long established "Zašto ne?" (Why not?) organization, which does a range of conventional NGO work, and Foundation EKIPA, which deals with art and music production. During my fieldwork, members of Citizen Action, some of which had migrated from DOSTA, perceived the latter organization to be both highly professionalized (in a negative sense), a bit disconnected from the citizenry, and too ready and willing to jump into bed with political parties, particularly the Social Democrats (which most members of Citizen Action see as highly detrimental to the future of progressive politics in the country). Yet in this case, largely because of Dejan's own engagement and willingness to build bridges, the two rival activist groups became united, at least for a short while.

<sup>19</sup> Dejan kept emphasizing that he was speaking to the institutions of law at "all possible levels" drawing attention to the absurd forms of institutional fragmentation instituted by Dayton.

the air to also confess that they too were authors of the disputed graffiti (Borić 2009). With a few days, the police was asking the public to stop confessing because—although they now understood the joke—the whole thing was beginning to create mounds of unnecessary paperwork.

In the meantime, Dejan was interviewed by various print and broadcast media, where he elaborated his motivations and launched into the public sphere more condemnations of Branković, his conduct and the incompetence of the local and Federal government. He also, in a distant and aloof manner, played up the uncertainty about whether or not he was really confessing, and whether or not he had really written the graffiti:

*“Maybe I am the hooligan who wrote that. The Office of the Prosecutor will check and establish the facts. In essence, Mister Prime Minister himself started all this by creating the ruckus around the graffiti. There are so many graffiti all around town, and still I don’t remember ever hearing so much noise about [the problem of] graffiti. I wanted to help all levels of police ...and so [I admitted] that I was the one who did it. Then, three or four thousand more people did the same thing after me. It will be interesting to establish who is the real hooligan.”* (Radio Sarajevo 2009, translation mine, emphasis mine)

The playful and fiery rhetoric Dejan deployed may have exuded confidence and bravado, but it in fact shrouded the seriousness of Dejan’s actions and the gravity of potential punitive measures against him. In a 2010 correspondence, Dejan explained that one of the reasons why he favored such confessions is the fact that by law, the police has a duty to investigate all claims, serious or not serious. Therefore, Dejan understood very well the significance of the act that he committed, by making himself known to the police and a subject of an investigation, in addition to exposing his name and person to the public and potentially those who wanted to harm him. In fact, Dejan paid for this position of “enabled vulnerability<sup>20</sup>” (Butler 1997b), by getting fired from his job. Unbeknownst to him, the vice president of the company for which he was working at the time was a member of Branković’s extended family. Soon after, he received an informal (and ‘shady’) offer of employment from the Opposition (the Social Democratic Party), which he promptly refused. Instead, he took a contracted job and used the momentum of the confessions to expand the campaign.

### *“Fake” billboards*

The second phase of the (anti-) Branković campaign began with the idea to create a series of fake ads on commercial billboard space, which would take both the ridicule of the Prime Minister and the tactics of overidentification to the next level. Using the Facebook group as a platform, Dejan organized a collection of individual donations among citizens supportive of the campaign. Part of the money was raised through sale of T-Shirts with a message “I wrote the

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<sup>20</sup> As a non-Muslim, Dejan was also criticized for meddling into Bosniak business, instead of going to criticize “his own” in Republika Srpska. Although I am not certain of Dejan’s ethnicity (and due to a shared sense of political intimacy and the ethical integrity that are wrapped up in those intimate relations, I will never ask), it is quite possible Dejan isn’t even Serb. Yet the very attempt to discredit him in such a way offers important clues to the lines of struggle facing those in Bosnia attempting to think and do politics beyond ethnic nationalism. It may be important to note that a significant number of activists of Citizen Action, are themselves ethnically ambiguous in the Muslim majority Sarajevo, and include a large number of children of so-called “mixed marriages.” Given the symbolic meaning and practical implications of such a pedigree in postwar Bosnia, this may help explain why their activism and political stance take form of a common disposition rather than of shared ideology.

graffiti” available for both men and women in various sizes. The rest of the money came from cash donations; in fact, Dejan remarked that during this time, people whom he never met before would hand him bundles of cash and leave envelopes in his mailboxes (email correspondence 2010). Having secured the funds, he navigated the again complex relationships between the two organizations with which he was affiliated, persuading Citizen Action to –on behalf of the campaign—sign a contract with the advertising firm Europlakat, which owned many billboards across the country.

As a professional designer who volunteered for the task, Zox (Ch 3) created two different billboard advertisements for a fictional real estate agency “In accordance with the law” whose most attractive sales offer involved an apartment with a surface of 132 squared meters for 940 convertible marks (BAM). The advertisement looked pretty generic and unremarkable; its unsuspecting design made it appear real, right up to the point when a passerby actually read the text. The simple statement of the ludicrous offer made apparent the absurdity of Branković’s claim that such a deal could have taken place: in accordance with the law. Yet the absence of vulgarity, outright criticism, or even direct mention of the Prime Minister’s name, helped frustrate further both Branković and his party, and for a moment suspended the possibility of an adequate response on behalf of the state (Yurchak 2010).



**Figure 45:** One of the billboards with a fake advertisement for the real estate agency “In accordance with the law.” Sarajevo, January 2009, Photo courtesy of Citizen Action

Since the activists collected a sum adequate for six billboards, and wanted to send the message across the Federation, they posted two advertisements in the capital, and one each in the cities of Tuzla, Zenica, Bihać and Mostar. In media interviews, Dejan described how these billboards came into existence, putting special emphasis on the fact everything done in the second part of the campaign had been done legally and in a democratic spirit.

“We do not do illegal actions and we do not support such [actions]. On the other hand, we are ready to use everything that’s offered to us by our [constitution]. Unless they pass in the Parliament the law for verbal derelict,<sup>21</sup> the famous article 133, and start sending us to jail

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<sup>21</sup> I discuss activists’ strategic use of socialist era symbolism—such as verbal derelict—in other parts of my dissertation. Briefly, one of the strategies most successful at irritating emergent nationalist elites and causing swift action on their part is exposing the

because we don't think the way we are told we should." (Radio Sarajevo)

In foregrounding the issue of legality, Dejan was undoubtedly playing with Branković's "in accordance with the law" rhetoric; when the journalist asked him about this apparent link, Dejan claimed that it was important to him that the Prime Minister realize we are listening to what he says and that his words do not go unnoticed (Radio Sarajevo 2009). This simple statement could be read on two levels: as a sincere and respectful acknowledgement and as a subtle but scathing form of ridicule, which also contained a slightly menacing quality. Dejan went as far as to define the orientation of the involved activists as legalist—a strange choice of words, yet one that I heard used by many informal activists over the course of my fieldwork. The real goal worth fighting for was the law itself; in order to achieve such a goal, one had to be and act in a *legal* manner.

This trope of legality experienced a remarkable vindication when the cantonal agency in charge of roads removed one of the unsettling billboards—along with the metal construction that held it—a few days after it had been put up. When the journalists attempted to learn what exactly happened, cantonal government explained that the billboard, along with hundreds of others, had been placed there illegally by Europlakat, and was subject to removal in an enforcement campaign that had been going on for days. Perhaps parasitizing on the witnessed activist strategy, the government spokesperson insisted that this event had nothing to do with the actual content of the billboard, but routine inspections and government work. But as Citizen Action observed, the very decision to remove illegal advertising slots on which this work was being based had been made in 2003, and had not been implemented until the anti-Branković campaign. It is remarkable, the activists stated, that it took the government so long to realize that these billboards should not even be there and to take some action to remove them. Sternly, but not without pleasure, they asked: Are campaigns such as this one necessary to get the state to act as a state ruled by law? The statement ended by demanding Branković's resignation and congratulating the citizens on proving to everyone that even small actions can produce "results"—namely, get the government to change its ways.

The leading Bosniak nationalist party—SDA—also learned from the anti-Branković campaign. Because of the Prime Minister's rising unpopularity, his many indictments and suspected involvement in corruption scandals, his party forced him to resign in June that same year. This decision came after a heated struggle between various factions within SDA that wished to dominate the party in preparation for the 2010 national elections; in the end, Sulejman Tihić, the more moderate and less controversial candidate for the party's presidency, won his reelection. The end result of these struggles was the sacrifice of Branković and his appointment as the Federal Prime Minister.

It would be naïve to claim that activist campaigns or the pressure of public did all the work necessary to remove Branković from his post, but undoubtedly, they tipped the resolution of internal power struggles among Bosniak nationalist politicians in a specific direction (see also CIN 2009). Branković went to trial that same summer, along with his patron, former Prime Minister Bičakčić who helped him pay for his apartment with state funds. The victory, however, was temporary: the charges were eventually dismissed because of lack of convincing evidence of wrongdoing, and Branković (so far) has not yet "ended up in the joint."

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ways in which their politics draws heritage from the socialist period—not in substantivist terms (i.e. social justice, multinationalism, workers' rights etc.) but in their authoritarian form.

*The strange love of the law*

The row of “fake” citizen confessions to the crime of graffiti vandalism, in an odd and unexpected way recalls the scene famously identified by Althusser in which the policeman calls out to a passerby and in so doing renders him (a) subject (Althusser 1971). For Althusser, moments such as this were central to making ideology material and securing the “reproduction of the conditions of production” in any given society. Yet in the Bosnian case, the very act of interpellation does not originate within the state institutions—that is, within what Althusser would deem “Ideological State Apparatuses.” It is instead the citizen, the willing subject who not only turns around but runs towards the law.

First, there is the original graffiti, which calls out to the *crook* that also happens to be a state official; its efficacy (as many of my interlocutors pointed out) proves Branković recognizes himself because he has a guilty conscience. Then, there is the ironic confession on behalf of an activist organization, soon to be followed by citizens’/activists’ admissions of guilt, at once sincere and subversive, that produce a series of other hails (or promised calls, such as the visit of the policeman, that never occur). The citizen and the state become implicated with each other in a mutually reinforcing way: the activists put up billboards that “call out” to the passers-by as well as government officials; the government officials in turn respond by enforcing a six-year-old ordinance that the activists—struggling for the “rule of law”—‘wanted’ implemented anyway.

Butler (1997a) critiques Althusser on the ground that his interpolative scene is both punitive and reduced, that it always already presupposes a willing subject who will turn around to face the law, and that it uses religious metaphors of conscience and guilt to presume “the grammatical “subject” prior to the account of its genesis”(111). Instead, Butler suggests that the subject is always already vulnerable to the law, because the law (or ideology) is the very condition of its existence:

For the “I” to launch its critique, it must first understand that the “I” itself is dependent upon its complicitous desire for the law to make possible its own existence. A critical view of the law will not, therefore, undo the force of conscience unless the one who offers that critique is willing, as it were, to be undone by the critique that he or she performs. (108)

By emphasizing the subject’s vulnerability and indebtedness to the law, Butler provides a potent critique of Althusser’s theory of ideology, revealing its debts to Marxist notion of false consciousness. Yet Butler herself never explicitly imagines the conditions under which the subject frantically runs towards the institutional apparatus because this apparatus seems to be withdrawing, unwilling *to subject* in the ways it had in the past and in that way enable the subject, the citizen, to come into existence. This passionate pursuit of recognition does not take up the demand for rights, but for *the law as a disciplinary tactic* of a regime that treats its “prisoners” (see Udruženje Akcija Građana 2009) with a bit more care, even if it condemns them (see Butler 1997a, pg 113). The subject “lives in passionate expectation of the law... Such love is not beyond interpellation; rather, it forms the passionate circle in which the subject becomes ensnared by its own state” (129). The fake confession is sincere in so far that it signals a willing submission that opens doors to a stifling yet necessary relationship.

In my analysis of the Mrnjavac Protests in Chapter 4, I argued that post-national(ist) articulations in Bosnia are increasingly taking the form of citizen demands *to be governed* (in a Foucauldian sense, as biopolitical subjects, able to have children, sell their labor, and plan the future), rather than asking for representation, rights or even entitlements. I want to push this argument further by looking at how this graffiti campaign called the law into being as a political symbol and an object of affective attachment. By insisting on “legality” of actions and procedures, Bosnian activists were at once articulating a desire for and making a mockery out of principle of the “rule of law.”

On the one hand, the professed desire for the law arises out of the postwar experience of precariousness and insecurity. The war did not simply destroy a way of being; it ushered in new subjectivities, new loyalties, new centers of power and forms of life. It also produced a new, privileged elite, which has little regard for the law, the struggles of others or the state of society at large. The fact is that the very conditions of (multiple) sovereignties in Bosnia were produced through a marriage of necessity and convenience between nationalist political elites, who wanted to build new states, and the criminal underground, which could provide the resources and manpower to produce the needed forms of violence. Some of this “manpower” emerged in the aftermath of the war, as the new generation of political leaders and tycoons, for whom the newly fragmented, absent state became the perfect playground.

This symbiosis has had immeasurable effects on the reshuffling of political and economic power, which has heightened the general sense of economic, social and political precariousness. The rise of violent crime, robberies and attacks, as well as the problem of “youth delinquency” emerge as particular manifestations of the internalization of this sense of disarray, lawlessness and hopelessness. The metaphors of “Wild West” and the “Kingdom of Darkness” (*tamni vilajet*) in some sense speak of this absence or withdrawal of the law itself. For many, this insecurity compounds the sense of injury and victimization that they experienced during the war. The strong fist of the law is yet another thing that Bosnians believe to have lost in the carnage of the 1990s.

Yet, while it bemoans this loss, the activists’ teasing also highlights the internal contradictions within the realm of law. On one level, the provocation helps bring to the surface the question of how a political framework produced by war, ethnic cleansing and systematic dispossession, could ever produce a state ruled by law. This is made evident, for example, in Dejan’s remark about “all levels of police” that must be included in the investigations about the graffiti. This phrase directly criticizes the ethnically based fragmentation of the state, without ever naming it as such. On another level, however, the playful nature of the criticism suggests that Dejan and his fellow activists are in no way shocked by illegal behavior of the Prime Minister and his political collaborators. Branković’s corruption was to be expected; rather, the problem is the broken relationship between the government and the people, based on a certain sense of reciprocity and understanding.

The disappointing performance of the Federation government and the impeding economic crisis did not help Branković’s popularity. But the depth of vitriol against him only made sense in light of his aloof attitude and perceived arrogance. The public found the Prime Minister’s perpetual sly smile off-putting and full of contempt, and interpreted the grimace as proof that Branković had no capacity for shame. This presumed affective incapacity disturbed many of my interlocutors more deeply than the actual economic and political crimes. For the disappearance of shame as a possible mechanism of social discipline signaled that bonds of reciprocity and



responsibility had been irreparably severed.<sup>22</sup> The teasing, hyperbolic manner of criticism, aimed at the re-disciplining and awakening this dormant affective capacity. Citizen Action’s mode of *zajebancija*, sought to outsmart, outwit, outdo –and hence embarrass, even humiliate the state and its officials. This type of humiliation presupposed a different kind of vulnerability—one based on a shared epistemology and affect. The row of *fake* confessions served as a reminder that the activists, citizens and the political authority remain linked in a perpetual, mutually-reinforcing way.

*Mirroring Power: The Scandalous “Glavuše”*



**Figure 46:** The “heads” waiting for the next tram at the station.

In 2008, as a part of its plan to bolster its presence on the streets and pursue new avenues of activism, Citizen Action commissioned the production of giant, Styrofoam puppet heads modeled after Bosnia’s key politicians and party leaders. The production of “heads” (*glavuše*) took place in stages, starting with those modeled after the two nationalist leaders, Milorad Dodik and Haris Silajdžić, who the public and the activists considered to be the most responsible for post-2006 political paralysis. However, as the political situation deteriorated, and new scandals came to light, the number of “*glavuše*” grew to seventeen. Eventually, all other leaders of key political parties, the three religious authorities and one international emissary, the passive and disinterested Miroslav Lajčak, served as inspiration for these unusual prosthetic artifacts. Gray, stern and immovable, and mounted on bodies of (usually) male volunteers, these “heads,” engage in various “scandalous” behaviors, including free-riding on public transportation, disturbing passers-by or chanting: “We are great at stealing, hire us!” On some occasions, the “heads”

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<sup>22</sup> In parallel to this alleged disappearance of shame, the term has also become a centerpiece of new articulations of ethical life. This dynamic can be powerfully illustrated by a meme that occasionally circulates through social media and internet, and offers a particularly telling twist on the Cartesian line: “I am ashamed, therefore I exist” [*Sramota me, dakle postojim*].



deliberately taunt the real-life figures that served as their models. During the series of failed constitutional reform negotiations in 2009, “glavuše” appeared at meeting sites where their “doubles” were discussing the country’s future. Glavuše held a simultaneous meeting at a makeshift restaurant table in front of the Parliament, where they apparently mimicked their counterparts, by drinking, brawling, and eventually tearing up the map of Bosnia. A few months later, the puppet heads lined up in front of the military base “Butmir” outside of Sarajevo, where these reform talks were to continue. While officials arrived in their dark Audis, *their* glavuše watched them, waving and holding a sign “We like it this way, too.”

Glavuše’s stoicism, gray tone finish and exaggerated features combine into a peculiar form of grotesque, that manages to at once capture the indifference of the new political elites and the impudent, self-righteous and libidinal political populism that today dominates political life. These giant and menacing puppet heads mirror the faces of power in postwar Bosnia, mimicking and “over-identifying with” –rather than directly resisting—the centers of political authority. The odd appearances at once unsettle and provoke laughter. Most of the time, their presence achieves ambiguous effects, sometimes leaving both their audience and the activists who use them unsure of what such provocations are supposed to accomplish. At the same time, and despite the ambivalence that enveloped them, glavuše not only helped Citizen Action develop a unique reputation, but also continuously brought together its members around the need to produce, improve, care for and transform these unusual political artifacts.

The idea to create Glavuše first came up during the 2008 protests sparked by the tragic murder of Denis Mrnjavac. Protesters interested in the political possibilities of performative strategies began talking to the “creative wing”—the designers and producers of protest artifacts, signs and other props. A significant role in this conversation went to Mirza Ibrahimpašić, academic painter, sculptor and caricaturist, and the man who would ultimately design and supervise the production of the gray-toned props. After he stumbled into the protests while walking around town with his elderly mother, Mirza became something of an unofficial designer and propagandist of the “Citizens of Sarajevo.” In this capacity, he produced a large series of protests signs featuring caricatures of Samir Silajžić and Semiha Borovac, as well as some other minor, scandal-enveloped officials. Many of these signs portrayed politicians in unflattering light and compromising positions, accentuating their grimaces and physical faults, so as to make apparent their moral and political deficits through a stylized representations of their bodies.

Like many other protesters, Mirza was disgusted by the insolence, incompetence and pettiness of government officials. When he described to me the circumstances of his own entry into activism, he cited that he grew especially irritated and angry when he spotted a pair of politicians in the mass of the protesters at the very first gathering. “What the hell did they come to protest!? Themselves? The government that they are in?” In response, I asked whether he thought they were there to spy, but Mirza quickly offered that they were there to be in “solidarity” [*došli valjda, da se solidarišu, šta li?*]. For Mirza, the apparent act of camaraderie aimed at the protesters who were actively complaining about the incompetence of politicians in power—represented precisely everything that is wrong with postwar Bosnia. In Mirza’s eyes, officials were supposed to do the business of “governing,” not come out in such a pathetic way and pretend to be a part of the mass. As a general rule, Mirza had no kind words for the nationalist elites; over time, he also withdrew his support for the parties that claimed to be the alternative, namely the liberal Naša Stranka, and the Social Democratic Party. Articulate, imposing and unafraid of public confrontation, Mirza did not believe in individual protest acts, but hoped that accumulation of discontent and protests on behalf of various dispossessed and

disenfranchised groups would eventually force political changes. During our interview in 2009, amidst mobilizations that I describe in the introduction, he too thought Bosnia, or at least Sarajevo is moving in that direction. And he was there to do his part. Feeling himself too old to run around and make ruckus on the streets, he provided the material foundation for his thirty-something fellow activists who eagerly embraced the props he designed.



**Figure 47:** Protesters carry the signs Mirza created during a protest in Sarajevo in March 2008. Photo courtesy of Ervin Berbić.



**Figure 48:** Mirza stands with a collection of other protest signs, during an exhibit dedicated to the one year anniversary of protests. Sarajevo, spring 2009.

Glavuše powerfully showcase Mirza’s aesthetic imprint, his style and in important ways, his political sensibilities. They strongly resemble his other political cartoons, caricatures and protest signs, in so far that they represent Bosnian politicians with enlarged heads and deep, unflattering features. Mirza’s elaborate cartoons were routinely printed during my fieldwork in the daily paper *Oslobodenje*. A brief examination of these images provides useful insight into Mirza’s style. On the first image shown below, we see Branković and Vjekoslav Bevanda, the Finance Minister of the Federation, attempting to curb financial disaster by looking to privatize the remaining state owned enterprises and use the money to (at least temporarily) pay for the

entitlement so crucial to maintaining social piece. Outside of their window stand various local and foreign “investors,” postwar businessmen and tycoons, and even Bakir Izetbegović, the son of Alija, the late wartime president of Bosnia, who gets front row seats to the show. The second caricature features a series of three images portraying the Minister of Education in the Canton of Sarajevo, the infamous superintendent Arzija Mahmutović and the Grand Mufti Cerić, conspiring to turn little children into religious fanatics. This particular caricature corresponded with the kindergarten controversies which I analyze in Chapter 3, and got Mirza into a great deal of trouble with the Islamic Community. At that time, there were threats of lawsuits, but instead of bowing down, Mirza published in *Oslobođenje* yet another scathing caricature, criticizing the Grand Mufti’s handling of allegations of sexual abuse by an imam in the village of Gluha Bukovica.



**Figure 49:** Two caricatures by Mirza Ibrahimpašić from *Oslobođenje*. Included with permission of the author.

The elaborate nature of Mirza’s cartoons suggests that the aim of these images does not lie with informing or “exposing the truth”; in order to work, such images count on its audience both knowing the characters and recognizing the details of their schemes. In other words, these caricatures presume an intimate public; something that Bosnians would call “čaršija,” a community that congregates around squares and commercial quarters, and participates in its daily activities (including “moving information around”). What’s more, their aesthetic form is brazen, luring, menacing and aggressive, making no appeal to understanding, tolerance or “political correctness.” Elements of the grotesque are apparent in the exaggerated facial features and giant, bobbing heads; the many intricate details hint at the opulence and vulgarity of political authority. All of these combined aesthetic choices help give texture to the micro-operations of power (see Mbembe 1992; 2001). Glavuše—though they must go into the world and interact to



bring to life this rich, colorful, carnivalesque background—share with the caricatures that same aesthetics whose purpose is to reenact—often in hyperbolic terms—the impudent practices and rhetoric of Bosnian postwar political elites.

Mirza began working on and produced the first set of heads in the fall of 2008, as freshly registered Citizen Action prepared for a new round of street actions on the eve of local elections. The money for the project initially came from the activists themselves, a few of whom contributed as much as 50-100 BAM (25-50 Euros) to pay for the materials and other production costs. As the “heads” began rolling down the assembly line, activists continued to pitch in by buying plaster and paint. Initially, the heads were painted in color, to resemble natural human features, but for the reasons of practicality, cost and time, Mirza opted for gray-tone paint instead. At one point, he could no longer keep up by himself, so he recruited two students from the Academy of Fine Arts, who sculpted the “heads” following Mirza’s instructions and designs. Over the next year, other members of Citizen Action participated in the production by helping clean up the mess in Mirza’s studio, purchasing and adapting long, white bed sheets that would become the heads’ cloaks and offering their physical labor to help improve the functionality and wearability of these props. On special occasions, the heads would undergo some modifications, usually provided by the members of the Citizen Action themselves. When the organization decided to do its own part in the “Deda Mraz Affair,” one of the members of the organization held a get together in her apartment, where activists transformed the “heads” into Santa-like figures by adding red colored cloaks and beards made out of old sheepskin rags. In this way, the “heads” occasionally became centerpieces of activists’ activities, bringing them together to work and play.



**Figure 50:** To the left, Mirza working on the "head" of Milorad Dodik in his studio.



**Figure 51:** To the right, members of citizen action hollow out the Styrofoam to make the "heads" easier to mount on their own.

Hard work paid off, in so far that the finished products always captured everyone’s attention. At the time of their initial appearance, as a part of the pre-election street action “ABCs of Democracy,” the “heads” caused an even greater sensation than the free carrot sticks being given out to the passersby (so that their senses can be sharpened, helping them vote “smarter”). The activist wearing the heads had been instructed to disrupt and annoy the passersby, behaving much like their real-life models. After the premiere in Sarajevo, Citizen Action and glavuše traveled to the nearby town of Konjic, for another weekend “action” with a similar plotline, where they captured the fascination of local children and teenagers. Once their line-up

sufficiently grew in numbers, they were next premiered in brand new hues on a Sunday afternoon in the early fall, when they embarked on their first tram ride. Four male volunteers, a few members of the logistics, two photographers and this anthropologist, spent the afternoon evading paying the tram fares and confusing and delighting fellow passengers. In the pauses between trams, *glavuše* ran around, danced, interacted with drivers and children, and posed for photographs. Though most of those that interacted with the props professed hating the politicians they represented, they touched and admired “the heads” gently and caringly, as if they were precious toys. On their part, activist wearing the heads experimented with a variety of improvisations. Sometimes, they would alternate between picking their noses, frolicking and waving at passersby. Someone suggested that they try to go after women’s purses, enacting, quite literally the ways in which politicians were stealing from the people. But no one was that brave, at least not yet.

Over the next months, *glavuše* would be used for a number of small street actions, such as for example, the official submission of the thousands of signed petitions for the resignation of Samir Silajdžić and Semiha Borovac, which were collected during the spring protests. As the procession of activists carried with great fanfare boxes filled with these petitions, Šemsudin, one of the “head-wearers” known for his wit and sharp tongue, chanted through the megaphone:

We swindle at no great cost, we take even children’s toys!  
We swindle, movable assets and real estate too.  
We don’t do anything and we don’t care  
We eat (roast) meats and we drink

*Otimamo povoljno, otimamo, i djeci igračke iz ruku uzimamo...*  
*Otimamo povoljno, otimamo, pokretnine, nekretnine*  
*Ništa ne radimo, boli nas briga*  
*Jedemo meso i pijemo...*

Some people stopped to observe and try to figure out what exactly was going on. Others rushed past the procession, not wanting to become personally implicated. And yet some others joined in, compelled by the artifacts and the chants, and curious about where it was all going. Although activists had a clear scenario and agenda, the entire procession soon became a form of good fun [*dobra zajebancija*]. Once the activists and the “heads” arrived in front of the government building where the petitions were to be dropped off, Šemsudin once more screamed into the megaphone: “We ask the Ministry to receive the delegation from the tavern [*delegacija iz kafane*].”

Eventually, Citizen Action produced a few You Tube videos that showcased *glavuše* and their activities. The first video chronicles the process of production of the heads, and features footage from the petition drop-off procession and the “heads” hanging out in the trams.<sup>23</sup> The second video, entitled “We too have a racing horse” [*I mi konja za trku imamo*] after a folk proverb, features a scenario inspired by the Branković graffiti scandal. In it, a select line up of “heads,” whose nicknames are playfully derived out of the various scandals in which their real life models were implicated, conspire together to remove an anonymous graffiti writer who is

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<sup>23</sup> See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FewDfN4kIwM> (Accessed November 1, 2012). Not by accident, its background soundtrack is in part provided by a song ‘Hajle Selasije,’ a slightly ridiculous homage to the Ethiopian leader, which was composed in the 1980s by Elvis J. Kurtovich, one of the founders of the New Primitiv movement.

attempting to criticize Branković.<sup>24</sup> The implication derived from the video is that nationalist politicians, despite their alleged disagreements and their inflammatory rhetoric, watch each other's back, especially in times when one of them becomes a target of an investigation.

Such “solidarity” is made apparent in the performances of the activists, too. Glavuše almost never appear individually, but always as an ensemble. Their indistinguishable colors and white cloaks emphasize similarity, ideological and all other, rather than distinction. Even though they represent members of different nationalist and anti-nationalist parties (president of SDP Zlatko Lagumdžija is also a part of the line up), their uses suggest that activists see these parties and individuals that lead them as hardly distinguishable, and equally vested in the preservation of the current state of affairs, which privileges them and those alike them. What is more, the activists' ridicule of the politicians' penchant for taverns, greasy food, alcohol and middle-aged pleasures of the flesh further underlines their grotesque form and design.<sup>25</sup> Free of bodies or orifices, the heads must externalize and complete their grotesque image through their behaviors.

Yet this peculiar play on the grotesque holds important clues for understanding of the form of critique exercised by the activists of Citizen Action, and more broadly, other creative producers who have embraced the genre as a means towards a social and political critique.<sup>26</sup> The flesh and the grease of contemporary social and political life have emerged as a prominent trope in the songs of Letu Štuke, one of the most politically vocal bands in postwar Sarajevo. Their second album even bears the name “Proteins and Carbohydrates” alluding to the Bosnian love of bread and meat combinations. In addition to the eponymous song, the album features another composition entitled “Nice urban folks” [*Fina gradska raja*] This song tells a story of a self-professed urbanite who surrenders to the appeal of greasy foods and the charms of the tavern singer, all the while claiming that he is only there because the firm for which he works has organized the celebration. Undoubtedly, the song is a scathing critique of the postwar society of hypocrisy and pretense, and yet also professes a kind of an affinity with and sympathy for the middle aged man who wears dentures and must undo a button on his pants to make room for the food he has ingested.<sup>27</sup>

This ambiguous affinity also marks the protestors' and onlookers interaction with glavuše—despite of who they represent, these “heads” are cared for and handled gently and playfully. This odd rapport parallels Bakhtin's understanding of grotesque as an aesthetics that does not merely ridicule or critique, but embraces a profound sense of ambivalence towards an

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<sup>24</sup> For the performance inspired by the Branković graffiti, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoOJ5RVT10A>. Upon seeing this homemade film, the producers of the show *Centralni Zatvor* on Federal Television invited glavuše to join them in the studio.

<sup>25</sup> The flesh and the grease of contemporary social and political life have emerged as a prominent topic in the songs of Letu Štuke, one of the foremost politically vocal bands in postwar Sarajevo. Their second album even bears the name “Proteins and Carbohydrates” alluding to the Bosnian love of bread and meat combinations. In addition to the eponymous song, the album features a number called “Nice urban folks” which tells a story of a self-professed urbanite who succumbs to the pleasures of greasy foods and the charms of the tavern singer, all the while claiming that he is only there because his firm has organized a celebration. Undoubtedly, the song is a scathing critique of the postwar society of hypocrisy and pretense, and yet also professes a kind of an affinity with and sympathy for the middle aged man who must undo a button on his pants to make room for the food he has ingested.

<sup>26</sup> I do not have the space here to adequately examine other instances of use of grotesque as a form of political and social critique in postwar Bosnia, so I will briefly mention one additional instance. Grotesque aesthetic forms and themes can be found on the website of the virtual parastate of “Bukovina I Hrastovina,” an online project that calls itself an “animated replica of an uncomfortable reality.” Creators of Bukovina I Hrastovina have modeled their project after other micronations, but primarily focus on production of political cartoons and animated videos.

<sup>27</sup> “But the question of eating, like that of scarcity, is indissociable from particular regimes of death, specific economies of pleasure, and specific therapeutic quests” (Mbembe 1997, 27). The metaphor of the belly and the processes of ingestion provide an exciting frame for thinking both about political authority and sociality—but I will have to defer closer engagement with Mbembe and Bayart (2003) for some other occasion in the future.

object that is at once frightening and disgusting, but also humorous and endearing (see Bakhtin 1984). Through the interaction with the activists and passersby, gigantic, grotesque heads became almost cute and quaint. Hence, what ultimately came through in the activists' use of these props is not simply the public's contempt for these figures, nor the activists' desire to resist their political authority. Rather, the subversive dimension of the heads manifests itself in "the logics of conviviality...the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, which inscribe the dominant and the dominated in the same epistemological field" (Mbembe 1997, 14). According to Mbembe, instead of being liberating, these kinds of "popular bursts of hilarity" in a strange way produce a situation of disempowerment for both the ruled and the rulers. But this is only cause for alarm if the point of "toying with power (instead of confronting it directly)" is indeed emancipation, rather than a willful submission.

### *The Butmir Incident: Glavuše go to Prison*

Despite the remarkable ways in which glavuše invited attention, their use in the street performances and provocations did not always have a clear and measurable outcome. This uncertainty about the actual role of the "heads" further bolstered their ambivalent effects. Occasionally, however, the "heads" *did* something more, such as in the case of "Butmir" action, which led to the arrest of nine Citizen Action activists. The activists had come to protests a farcical series of negotiations over constitutional reforms, attended by the leaders of all major political parties and the international diplomatic corps. Despite conjuring hopes of political resolution, the public quickly realized that the negotiations would not usher in any changes, namely because of the posturing and intransigence of local political elites, which eagerly blocked the possibility of any agreement. Citizen Action shared with the rest of Bosnians a dismissive attitude towards these meetings, and wanted to make its opinion known. But things did not go as expected. In staging their provocation, the activists "accidentally" crossed the unmarked border between the two administrative entities, the Federation (controlled by Muslims and Croats) and Republika Srpska, which have different laws regarding public assembly. In becoming caught up—quite literally—in the consequences of political and administrative fragmentation, these activists inadvertently exposed the absurdity and arbitrary nature of postwar power.

The military camp Butmir, located in the vicinity of Sarajevo airport, sits exactly on the border between the Federation and Republika Srpska. Today, it stations battalions of the EUFOR forces, even though some of its facilities continue to be used by the Ministry of Defense. Allegedly, Butmir had been chosen as the meeting site because the International Community wanted to exert pressure on Bosnian officials and control the flow of the meeting. Citizen Action found an opportunity in this choice of location too, because its proximity to Sarajevo suited their lunch-break time limitations. The idea was simple: the activists would go to Butmir with the giant heads and enough volunteers to wear them. Glavuše would line up, wait for the procession of cars, and then wave in unison at the politicians that they represented.

In preparation for the "akcija," two members of the Citizen Action drove to Butmir and met with one of the commanding officers in EUFOR, to ask for the permission to enact this scenario. The commanding officer liked the idea and gave the activists the green light. Trusting his verbal approval was enough, the activists went back to Sarajevo and started planning the logistics for the operation, including recruiting a number of male friends to serve as the "base" for the ever-growing number of heads. Those with access to cars were to transport the heads and

the rest of the activists to the site. A few people took the day off to be able to participate; others planned to take a longer lunch break. Just before noon on October 9, a row of cars started its way toward Butmir.

Once the activists arrived, they were rerouted and instructed to approach the base from the second entrance, situated on the territory of Republika Srpska. There, the police forces told them they were not letting anyone come closer to the base on account of security, and that the activists would have to remain closer to the exit. Initially, the police officers allowed the activists to park and take out the props. Activists mounted the heads, and took out sheets of printed papers, with such messages as: “We may be rodents, but we are still in charge” [*Možda smo miševi, ali kolo vodimo*]. They also spread out a large cloth banner, with a message for the politicians “We like it this way, too!” The journalists and photographers quickly and eagerly turned their attention to the activists and their props, and began talking to the activists in order to learn more about their opinion of the constitutional reform talks.



**Figure 52:** Glavuše meet in a makeshift tavern in front of the Parliament. Sarajevo, Spring 2009. Photo Courtesy of Inga Geko

But before interviews could happen, an officer in charge from the Republika Srpska Police came up and told the activists they had to stop and go. Given his irritated, brash manner, the guys wearing the props started to withdraw and take off their masks. But this did not seem to satisfy the officer, who soon sent a police van. Other police officers allowed the activists to take off and put the “heads” back in their cars, but soon began escorting them, one by one, into the vehicle. The female activists, who had come as logistical and moral support, were not as easily identifiable in the crowd of journalists, and therefore had a window of an opportunity to make a choice. One of the female activists, “Iris,” upon realizing the men were being taken by the police, demonstratively entered the vehicle herself, asking “Where are you taking them?” Other women helped put back the props into the car, while I telephoned a friend and a fellow activist who had a better understanding of the police procedures and what was about to happen to all of us. In the meantime, Jasmina, whose fear of police had become legendary, got on the phone in an attempt



to get the rest of us a cab. She used the disorganization of the moment as a chance to organize a partial escape. As I talked on the phone, pondering the consequences of my own arrest on the fact I was scheduled to return to the US in a few days, I noticed “Nađa,” one of the younger female activists waving as if to instruct me to follow her. Making my way towards her, I realized we were amidst of an escape. With a hurried step, we made our way through the corn field of a neighboring house, trying to stay out of sight as the two police vans carrying the male activists passed us by on the road. Jasmina, focused only on getting us some transportation back to the city, had turned completely pale. Finally, we emerged through the cornfield into the front yard of someone’s house. A man sat on the bench peeling potatoes—Jasmina asked for a sip of water from the faucet of his front yard sink.



**Figure 53:** To the left, To the right, Glavuše line up in front of the Camp Butmir, minutes before the activists' arrests

To our tremendous surprise, our cab showed up just a minute later, and the four of us, escapees, got in. At that point, all of us started dialing the phones to call our remaining members, the organization’s legal consultants and lawyers, friends in the non-governmental sector, friendly journalists and anyone else who would care to listen. In the pauses between the talks, we frantically shared details about the event and hypotheses about what was going to happen to our fellow activists. Finally, the worried cab driver asked: “Well, people, will someone tell me what happened to you?!” Luckily, he turned out to be sympathetic to our causes and methods, and drove us all the way back to the city.

That entire afternoon, we went back and forth on the phones, consulting with other members of the organizations, the board of managers, and other “experts.” The acting president of the organization and another Citizen Action member who happened to be a lawyer went to the police station in Republika Srpska to visit the “arrested” activists who were having a surprisingly pleasant time with the rest of the police officers (most of whom were entertained by their unexpected visit and wanted to learn more about the “heads”). At some point, Srđan Dizdarević, the president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia, came to visit what appeared to be “political arrestees.” On the way out, he was interviewed, also visibly amused by

the situation, and assured the public and the journalists the activists were fine and about to be released. And so it happened: the police issued a citation to the organization, rather than its individual members, for failure to obtain prior permission to organize the protest. It took the circuit court in Sokolac about a year to process the case, at which time the organization had to pay a fine.

And therein the activists discovered a paradox: since their beginnings as “Citizens of Sarajevo,” the activists had never needed to gain formal permission from the government to stage any kind of a street protest or *akcija*, because the laws regulating public assembly in the Federation and specifically Canton of Sarajevo do not make such demands. Communication with the local government, and especially the police and other services, had been a matter of courtesy in the cases of larger protests, but unnecessary for small scale street actions such as the one planned for Butmir. By contrast, under the leadership of Milorad Dodik and SNSD, the new laws pertaining to political gatherings made organizing public meetings and assemblies a much more onerous and complicated process, requiring that the organizers submit paperwork and obtain approval from the government at least five days before the event. The activists were cited for failing to follow this procedure. However, Citizen Action never even planned to protest in Republika Srpska—the security personnel at the base rerouted them to the other gate, on the other side of the complex, where they were prevented from making their way closer to the official entrance to the base. When activists tried to explain that EUFOR gave them permission, the police officers did not react.

The “arrest” of activists of Citizen Action was as unprecedented as it was absurd. The official line of the authorities was that the activists failed to properly announce their “protest.” On their part, the activists insisted that they obtained verbal permission from the EUFOR commanding officer, who allowed them to stage their non-violent, “non-threatening” assembly against the political leaders (Udruženje Građana Akcija Građana 2009). The police, however, prevented them from entering the base and arrested them near the entrance. At the site, witnessing the (over)reaction of the officer of the RS police, who ignored the fact his first warning was working and that the additional threats or punishments were unnecessary, I wondered if something else had happened to provoke this course of action. I had a feeling that there was more to his reaction than met the eye. Be that as it may, the police invoked the letter of the law, and swiftly removed the activists from the scene.

Everyone, including the police officers, the journalists, Dizdarević, and the public, saw this act as excessive, and the scenario, completely comical. Political authority, in place of strong and resolute, appeared as frightened, dogmatic, irrational, overly dramatic, and unsure of itself. Its reaction was precipitated by an accidental act of crossing an otherwise invisible boundary, where the citizen subject was expected to follow a different legal code, whose very existence further exposed the arbitrariness of state power. Still, there was nothing arbitrary about the effects of the state’s actions. The “arrested” activists could have faced very serious consequences, especially because some of them never came back to work after “long lunch breaks.”

Those of us who fled worried that our comrades might be disappointed and angry with us. But instead, the arrested and the fleeing, and those who never even went to Butmir, all came together that evening, for a previously scheduled “goodbye party” in my Sarajevan home. There, on a 1988 Samsung cathode ray tube television with bunny ear antenna, which no longer “remembers” any channels, we watched the evening news and the scenes from Butmir. We discovered there an interrupted interview with an enraged Dinko, who was trying to make a point

about democracy and protest before being ushered into the police van. We also heard the high-pitched wailing of the wife of one of the arrested activists, who subsequently opted not to join her husband but flee the scene with “Jasmina” and me. Feeling intensely bonded by the shared experience, despite the divergent paths of our day, we laughed at and with each other, “to tears” [*do suza*]. Later, amidst a sea of glasses, beer bottles and ashtrays, my ethnographic interlocutors, who had long before that moment become my friends, sang to me “Amerika” a song by an 1980s Sarajevan rocker, Gino Banana, today the frontman of Seattle-based Kultur Shock.

*Crossing over: On Complicity and Ambivalence in Activism and Ethnography*

The reconfiguration of conventions of activist work gradually in my case invited a reconfiguration of my understanding of conventions of ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological rapport. To start, my own position as an anthropologist studying the place and the people among whom I was born and socialized, was already in some ways unconventional. No doubt, my position as a Sarajevan born scholar, who remained in the city during the wartime siege, continued to regularly visit and spend time in Bosnia, and who successfully (but not without effort) passes for a local and not diasporan, made the establishment of ethnographic rapport much easier. My long-term interest in activism in Bosnia, my own previous stunts as a student activist and affinity for unconventional political intervention made me unusually available for the integration into the group. All these aspects of my positionality remain relevant, even as I insist that the label of native anthropologist does not really fit me, not only because I have lived in the States since 1996, but because in my view, as an anthropologist, I am never able or meant to be “native” in any context that is the explicit focus on my study (see Narayan 1993; c.f. Bunzl 2008). The task of the ethnographer, at least as I understand it, is to always float in the space between complete emersion in the cultural context and that of an eternal, impenetrable distance from it, the one that makes the work of anthropological analysis and reflection possible.

To keep myself afloat in this liminal space, I devised during my fieldwork a set of (rather arbitrary) rules. In order to gain the trust of the people among whom I was conducting research, I became an official, card carrying, membership-paying member of Citizen Action. However, during the fall 2008 deliberations, I refused to be one of its founders, because I felt my late arrival on the scene did not entitle me to such role. I also worried about the problems that my eventual departure may cause to the organization, whose founders had special responsibilities and roles. In my capacity as a member, I participated in various activities, including street actions, meetings, congresses, visits to government officials, training seminars, workshops, roundtables and numerous and varied social occasions. Although I sought to stay on good terms with everyone, I occasionally voiced my disagreement or leveled criticism at other members. I contributed small amounts of cash to various campaigns and provided donations in kind. I shared my entire media research with the organization, and was in charge of keeping track of news reporting on youth crime and government accountability. I helped write press statements and translate materials into and back from English. But there were certain things that I did not do. For example, I had to turn down the requests to join the group’s PR wing, more precisely to assume the responsibilities of the porte-parole. I did so not only because I was too shy and felt to be ill-suited for the job, but also because I believed such a move might hurt the organization that

depended so much on its popular legitimacy. In my view, having a diasporan academic as the face of Citizen Action did not amount to a good strategic decision.

I also took the care to never be the one to initiate ideas for different street actions or the future course of the organization. In my mind, my role was to be first and foremost that of a participant-observer; I wanted to avoid overly influencing outcomes, because my role was to study and not “change” the terrain. Though in principle I had no interest in outdated conventions of positivist science, I was becoming concerned that too much interference would not only “spoil” my site and make invalid my data, but also throw me into the jaws of “auto-ethnography” for which I had no interest.

But one evening, during a meeting of “*akcijaši*,” the practical wing of the organization in charge of street actions and protests, I broke my own rules. Several of us were hanging out in Darjan’s apartment, discussing plans for future actions and offering suggestions. I had recently read in one of the magazines about a similar activist group in Croatia, whose members used a form of overidentification to provoke a Croatian tycoon who had purchased a national heritage site promising to transform it into a hotel, only to turn it into his own private residence. The Croatian activists decided to “play stupid” and pretend that they were the tourists who booked rooms in this non-existent hotel. They rented a van and rang the doorbell, playing the part of an earnest, clueless visitors just arriving to Zagreb for the first time and eager to get into their hotel rooms. It took the security and the villa’s new owner a few minutes to figure out what actually was going on. Perhaps, I suggested, in the spirit of our own *zajebancija*, we could do something similar...?

The remaining *akcijaši* liked the story too, and we began discussing how we could adapt this strategy to our own context. Without much thought, I suggested we go to the Development Bank [*Razvojna Banka*] which had recently been in the news for misusing millions of marks intended for development of the economy on pet construction projects of a few Bosniak tycoons. In addition to illegally and monopolistically distributing public funds to the political elite, the Bank’s director, Ramiz Džaferović also had the habit of pressuring grant holders into hiring his own private accounting and auditing firm to manage these accounts. Such illegal behavior had long been the norm for Džaferović, whose track record included a removal from the position of Director of the Federation Tax Administration in 2000 by the High Representative Petrisch over allegations of corruption (See OHR decision 27/7/2000). In spite of his legal and political troubles, but thanks to his savvy and loyalty to his party SDA, he was once again appointed as a director of a major financial institution, where he earned in 2008 a *reported* income of nearly half a million euros (Pećanin 2009; Emrić 2010). For weeks, the media wrote about questionable activities of this director, as well as his ties to high-ranking Bosniak nationalist leaders who depended on Džaferović “talents.”

The other activists, well-aware of the media coverage on the Development Bank and allegations against Džaferović agreed this was a good idea. Soon, we began developing a scenario: we would arrive with fifty people to form a line in front of the building, claiming we had heard there was money being given out at low interest rates. Adding to the ridiculous set up, we would have folders with bogus projects like “Constructing an underground tunnel to the EU” and insists we were legitimate entrepreneurs. And we would try to stick to the plan for as long as we could, insisting we were sincere and serious. Some variations of the scenario also involved *glavuše*, which would come there either to distract us, claiming this was “their money” or to wait in line with us with fake projects that promoted the agenda of their own political parties. Either

way, we had to assure that the media would be there, and ready to share information about the action through the various broadcast and printed channels.

After our initial meeting, we realized that the organization had already scheduled other activities in the week that we initially selected for the Development Bank campaign. We decided to retract the date, and reschedule, even though we had already let our contacts in the journalist community know that we were preparing a scenario to bring more attention to accusations against Džaferović. But the message did not reach one of the key journalists. Friday morning, enjoying my morning coffee and looking through the paper, I accidentally caught the article announcing the fact we would be at Development Bank that very same day on noon. I called other *akcijaši* in panic, to let them know we had a serious problem.

After a lot of back-and-forth and much reciprocal blaming, the organization's president decided we would go to the Bank anyway with a slightly changed scenario and a smaller group. The event was already announced and we simply could not afford not to show up, despite the fact we had less than 3.5 hours to make it all happen. Amidst all the drama, we managed to arrive on location 15 minutes before noon, with a newly finished "head" of the Prime Minister Branković, which was to play the role of our *štela* or "hook-up." Just as we were arriving, we saw Džaferović and a few other male consultants leaving to attend the Friday prayer. This sight further discouraged us. But the journalists were eagerly waiting in front of the building, unaware of our fights and backstage problems

On our way into the Bank, we encountered a counter-delegation of security guards, secretaries, receptionists and a few senior office workers, who were expecting us on the account of having read the papers. The security guards seemed adamant to not allow the activist wearing Branković's "head" to come in, nor let the cameraman or the photographer shoot the interaction. Lacking a clear scenario and with minimal preparation, we were forced to improvise. Our delegation began by announcing that we were there to collect application forms and promotional materials for our development project "Let's Dig a Tunnel to the EU!" As the clerks looked at us in confusion, I realized the provocation could only work if we were firm in stating our case and unflinching in our disposition. Sensing a potential disintegration of our intentions, I stepped in and took on the role of a primary speaker.

I explained to the bank delegation that we were there because we had an excellent plan for development of Bosnia, which consisted of streamlining our entry into the EU and future economic development by yet again building a savior tunnel. To help make our case, we had brought "Prime Minister Branković" as our inside man and "expert advisor." We chose him because he already had some experience with building tunnels—namely the one that connected Sarajevo with the rest of the world during wartime. While explaining this, I pointed to the activist wearing the "head" outside of the glass door, as if he were the real Branković. Meanwhile, one of the senior consultants attempted to patronize us, suggesting that we were rude, insolent young people. To do so, she made a misguided claim that "her daughter" (who was presumably supposed to stand in for all young people of Bosnia), "is happy and proud that her mother is working in the Development Bank." With no small doze of irony, I replied that we "were sure her daughter, as well as her nieces, her godchildren and all of her extended family, were *very* happy she was working there." From that point on, a battle raged between us. I politely mocked the clerk's attempts to convince me that the Development Bank was a beacon of hope for Bosnia. Furthermore, I insisted that our delegation was there out of sincere desire to obtain information in order to apply for the funds their bank was offering to 'all' citizens.

Unsure how to handle us, another female clerk began insisting that we fill out a sign/in

sheet with our names and ID numbers. Although all of us understood this to be a strategy of intimidation, some of the activists decided to brave the consequences and sign the sheet. I later used the opportunity opened by the clerk's claim that all information about opportunities at the Development Bank was available to the public, to make a case against the sign-in sheet and force the clerk to hand me the list (with which I happily walked away).

But, while I was having a lot of fun up front with the rest of the activists, tensions were running high in the background. The security guards got into an argument with the news-crew, and threatened to physically throw them out of the building if they did not stop filming. The secretaries, the receptionists and the rest of the administrative workers became so alarmed, that they started compiling the promotional materials and making dozens of copies of guidebooks for us. I stood there next to another member of the organization, smiling politely and looking the security guards in the eye. Pumped up on adrenaline, I was not my usual self. I calmly and pleasantly thanked the workers for their efforts, refused their offer of more copies by saying we wished to spend no more of public funds, and exited while insisting they say hello to their director and wish him luck in court.

As we fled the scene, the mood was jubilant. I received undisputed praise from other activists for stepping up and taking charge of the entire situation. Some teased me that I had shown my "true face" (and "backface"), and that the workers did not know what hit them. Another person even said something about "messing with the wrong blonde." Later that evening, the journalists who followed us ran a very good news segment, which focused on the verbal threats to the news crew as well as on the content of the "performance". The following day, the press also ran articles with great photographs of the action. The members of the organization proclaimed the action an unexpected success. Word quickly spread as other activists learned about my performance. Though I had already been accepted as a part of the organization, it was as if my improvised reaction took down the last barrier that I had erected in order to keep myself at a distance. That day, for all intents and purposes, I proved that I was one of them.

My own reaction was far more complex. On the day of the action, after it was all done, we settled in nearby café to recompose. It was only then that I began thinking about what I had done, and what could have been the consequences. To be honest, I expected we would have a much worse time on the scene, because Džaferović had previously kicked out the police inspectors who had come to collect documentation about the bank's work. In that sense, his absence proved to be a blessing in disguise. Yet I could not help feel a sense of unease, because in attacking Džaferović, we were provoking a figure that had all the marks of being dangerous and unscrupulous. My sense of panic grew as one of the new activists, a former journalist herself, began to recall the serious threats she received after she reported on a corruption scandal. I started wondering to what extent we were identifiable, and at what point would the regime begin seeing us as a serious threat. In crossing over, I started for the first time to feel a sense of acute vulnerability that came with being a political provocateur, one that I had previously only understood in abstract terms. Perhaps the fear that I did not feel on site caught up to me. Through my head ran all the stories about threats, losses of jobs, attacks on children and various other forms of intimidation that I had learned about during my fieldwork. I felt a strong urge to reach out for a Valium. Instead, I bought a colorful scarf on the way home. Later that evening, I cried.

For days after, I thought about what my performance and my reaction to it represented for me as an anthropologist. One of my favorite anthropological anecdotes from the field comes from Cliff Geertz's text "Deep play" (1973). Geertz's efforts to engage ethnographically with the

Balinese villagers fail until the fateful moment when the cockfight he attends with his wife gets interrupted by the arrival of the police. Instead of sticking around with a defense of “a naive white tourist accidentally getting sucked into illegal dealings of the locals,” the couple chooses to “run with the natives”. The following day, when the police comes to the village to look for them, the village leader sends them away, aggressively insisting that the village guests attended no such event. From then on, Geertz's fieldwork reaches a turning point. Having become "complicit" with the natives and their illegal activities, Geertz is offered an entry into the social life of the Balinese village he had come to research.

George Marcus (2003) made much of this narrative in his article entitled "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-scene of Anthropological Fieldwork" where he zoomed in on the nature of the "rapport" between the researcher and her informants. This relationship, Marcus argues, entails "a certain affinity, a shared concern, a willingness to enter into potentially compromising situations...so as to get closer to things" (171). Such a step demands abandonment of the position of ethnographic authority—the engaged yet objective observer who is at the same time an outsider's insider. It proposes a surrendering to a kind of a logic of the moment, which may help bring a researcher someplace else, someplace not already known or anticipated. Such a tactic, Marcus declares, is more appropriate for addressing the ambivalence and existential doubleness of both the anthropologist and the subjects. It troubles the very notion that an authoritative, all-knowing representation of the "field" is even possible.

Rereading Marcus' text in the aftermath of my intervention, I first realized that a crucial part of his discussion in the above-mentioned paper is the notion of the "mise-en-scene." The space of ethnographic engagement does not precede the arrival of the anthropologist; rather, it becomes generated through her attempts to engage with others and the context itself. Hence, the anthropologist is always in part an initiator (a co-author if you will) –the presence of a researcher always, inevitably and essentially transforms informants' reactions.

Undoubtedly, my *compliance* and coauthoring in the field began long before the Development Bank action. But it took the crossing of a certain threshold to take me to a new level of understanding—one that became manifest through affect rather than reflection. My visceral response and recognition of acute vulnerability not only reminded me of the difficulty of activist work stemming out of the enormous force of inertia in existing relationships, and the tragic sensibility that often marks the work of activists. Provocation is a risky business, one that exposes an already defenseless subject to greater scrutiny, precariousness and inestimable consequences. To wish to call, or better yet, lure, the Law into being, opens the door to, as Butler puts it, the subject being ensnared by his own state. In the Bosnian postwar context, the provocateur also makes himself known to the extralegal forces and the dark undergrounds that soldier to keep in place the status quo. Such troublesome alliances permeate the new order of things, ensuring things will remain as they will.

The recognition of such vulnerabilities does not simply freeze political subjects in time—rather it often spawns dreams of a revolution and mass revolts, prompting many Bosnians to argue that certain forms of violence remain necessary to undo the brutality and the injustices of the constitution of the Bosnian postwar state. According to this view, the political realm must be purged so as to make a brand new world possible. The fact such scenarios never materialize does not mean they are impossible—in fact, just the opposite may be true. Given the levels of anger and rage, it may be a miracle that such a watershed moment has not yet happened. But the citizens and activists alike know the price of transforming the world—and know that things could always get much worse. At least for the time being, the vulnerable provocateur can do

little else but tease, hoping to render its cohabitation with political authority a little more bearable.

### *Vulnerability in the Times of Impasse*

Times of impasse do not simply impede political engagement, but make necessary certain forms of aesthetic and political experimentation. In the case of postwar Bosnia, activists of Citizen Action drew on their unique consciousness of the times, and their affinity towards absurdity, performance and parody, to reimagine activism as quotidian practice and a type of good fun. Despite the improvisations, stresses and uncertainties that marked the group's work, their street actions and unusual campaigns often have the effect of spurring into action the absent Bosnian state, which serves as the ultimate target of criticism, and the national public, whose support activists need and desire. Through the various performances and provocations, Citizen Action wished not only to reveal the inadequacies of the postwar state, but also, by mocking and taunting, simultaneously bring it into being.

Through its playful criticisms, the organization also signaled to the imagined audience of citizens that activists shared their sense of cynicism and distance toward direct and conventional forms of political engagement, which are frequently seen as empty and shallow. In this way, members of Citizen Action sought to set themselves apart from a certain naïve, earnest vision of what it means to be an activist. Given the pervasive skepticism about all forms of politics, the choice of deep parody as a strategy for political engagement could communicate to the presumably savvy Bosnian audience that activists shared their complicated, jaded attitudes about political intervention at large. In this way, members of Citizen Action, despite their extraordinary, and potentially problematic role as activists, could show that they too belonged to the same social body.<sup>28</sup> Such performances created a sense of “political intimacy” (Klymbite 2011), helping render the activists' interventions popular, or at least attention grabbing, even when they were not particularly successful. Finally, activist experimentation coalesced the group internally, creating a sense of exuberance, belonging and solidarity among the individuals who participated in these actions. It was precisely through the active labor of performance and provocation, and the “good fun” of it all, that activists, many of whom did not share the same views on policy or strategy, could begin seeing themselves as a collective political agent (see Arenas and Dzenovska 2012).

The case studies that I have presented here offer important clues for the analysis of the practices of political engagement that escape off the radar of conventional political analyses or are otherwise simply reduced to proof of increasing “democratization” of Bosnian society. I contend instead that these strategies are situated, historically resonant responses to the enclosures of post-Dayton “democracy,” that seek to intervene in the political life by undermining the very assumptions about how such forms of participation ought to look like or work. In other words, it is precisely when these tactics are used that we begin to see the reification of political apathy as an impediment to understanding rather than a viable diagnosis of the Bosnian political present.

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<sup>28</sup> Such a form of sociality comes close to what Yurchak describes in the Soviet context as *svoi* or “those who belong to the same circle” (102), but is not namable in the same way in the Bosnian context. In Bosnian, “svoj” means—independent, unique, and specific. *Naši*—ours, can sometimes serve the purpose of describing a form of cultural intimacy, but has a potentially distracting ethnic or national connotation.



## CONCLUSION: A POLITICS OF “NOT YET”

*In the oscillation between this state of neither great crisis nor final redemption there is nothing spectacular to report.*

(E. Povinelli, 2012, 4)

In August 2009, just as residents of Sarajevo anticipated with excitement the opening of the city’s annual film festival, another pair of violent, senseless murders disrupted the quaint late-summer lull. First, a mentally ill man murdered his estranged wife. And then, on the night of August 13, two young men killed 23-year-old Amar Mistrić, a waiter in the café bar who denied them another round of drinks after closing time. The drunken pair, presumably annoyed that their evening’s fun had come to a close, shot a bullet through Mistrić’s head, and fled the scene. Mistrić, a handsome, likeable young man, with stellar reputation among his friends and neighbors, died two hours later on the hospital table.

The events of this bloody August immediately recalled the murder of Denis Mrnjavac, whose fatal stabbing on the tram inspired months of protests around questions of juvenile justice and government accountability that play the key role in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. As the media and the wider public pondered the parallels between these events, former protesters-turned-political activists wondered whether time had come again for the masses to hit the streets. The tensing atmosphere in the city suggested such an outpouring of anger might indeed take place. Following the news of Mistrić’s death, hundreds of Sarajevans stormed the internet news portals and discussion forums to express their reinvigorated outrage. Once again, commentators wondered if Sarajevo had become “the Wild West,” where people were free to shoot each other at random and without consequence. One opinion piece writer proclaimed that “[I]f, which this city once celebrated, has become so valueless that it takes no effort at all to lose it somewhere in the dark” (Burski 2009). In heavy pathos, he asked: have Sarajevans forgotten the war so much so that they are now ready to kill each other “over a look, some money, a mobile phone or a drink” (ibid)? Those less poetic, but no less angry, simply asked: where are the officials who promised reforms?

The following day, Mistrić’s relatives, neighbors and friends, invited Sarajevans to join them in front of the iconic “Windmill” flower shop [*Vjetrenjača*] in their neighborhood of Čengić Vila, to pay their respects to the victim. No one really knew what form this gathering would take, although people that planned to go anticipated that it would “turn political.” That afternoon, as residents of the city embarked on their commute home, a crowd of some hundred Sarajevans gathered in front of *Vjetrenjača*. I joined my key informants from Citizen Action, Darjan, Jasmina and others, who rushed to the site after work, to express their solidarity.

Fifteen minutes after we arrived on site, about thirty young men and women, dressed in white shirts with a printout of Mistrić’s photograph, joined the crowd. In seconds, several cars driven by their friends lined up in the intersection, creating a barricade that would block the traffic on the main thoroughfare, which connects the peripheral high-rise neighborhoods with the city’s center and old town. As drivers stepped out of the cars, one of them announced they would not move until someone from the government comes to the site and addresses their demands. The chief of them concerned the arrest of Anel Herak and Emir Vuk, the two twenty-two year olds who killed their friend.

By erecting a barricade to block the passage of afternoon traffic, Mistrić's neighborhood staged an interruption—a physical fissure in the landscape and movement of the city—and in doing so seemed to blast open a moment of political possibility. Emotions ran high and for a moment, I thought things might turn violent. The police showed up almost immediately; but the officers on the scene, unsure of how to handle the assembled mass, proceeded to redirect the traffic so as to avoid physical confrontations between the protesters and the drivers. In the meantime, the barricaders, firm in their requests and inconsolable in their sorrow, sat on the pavement with white roses and photographs of their friend, sobbing. Nevertheless, their uniforms and planned actions signaled that they had in mind a purpose greater than the public exhibit of their collective grief.

Former protesters and leaders of the 2008 mobilizations, including activists from Citizen Action and DOSTA, cautiously approached the group with the offer of help. From the start, the activists' delegation recognized the neighborhood's desire to turn Mistrić's death into a symbol. To help them link their own tragedy to a larger set of concerns, the activists suggested a new version of the 2008 slogan: "How many more Denis's and Amars?" Mistrić's friends liked the idea, and soon erected a huge banner with that same question, hoping that this haunting condemnation would inspire greater interest in their nascent protest. Over the course of the next few weeks, this sign remained in the intersection, becoming a part of the city's landscape.

The neighborhood and the protesters spent more than a week guarding the intersection "round the clock," despite an unusually cold and rainy August. For the first few days and nights, the atmosphere was tense and determined, and the crowd unyielding and unresponsive to the requests to move. A parade of government officials, including the municipal prefects, the chief of police, the city's major and the Prime Minister of the canton and the Federation made their appearances in an attempt to address the gathered mass and convince them to forgo their barricade in place of some other form of protest. Some figures were welcomed more than others—there were boos, aggressive questions and dismissive comments. Grief over Mistrić's quickly murder gave way to political outrage whose target was, as always, the befuddled, disarrayed and increasingly withdrawn postwar state. Had all this not happened once? What were they doing to improve the safety of citizens? What happened to their promises to close the gaps in the criminal system, build prisons and various other disciplinary institutions? And so on.

After making it out of the crowd alive, and entering their dark limousines and Audis, the officials left promising to bring reforms. In the week to follow, the government held numerous meetings to discuss future measures, which included a crackdown on illegal weapons (the material residues left behind by the war) and the forming of a special police task force in charge of improving the safety of citizens. But the slow pace of reaction and the inability of the police to crackdown on the suspects, left citizens unimpressed. Upon being asked by the journalists about the events and the reaction of the officials, one elderly protester from the neighborhood exclaimed: "On the beautiful police baton of Tito" [*Lijepi Titin pendrek*]. To many of the assembled people, it was not just Mistrić's ghost that haunted the barricade, but also that of the iron fist of the strong socialist state. It was as if the barricade sought to conjure up, yet again, this absent yet postpresent state (see Dunn 2008).

But in order to call officials to action, the barricade needed more people, who would help the crowd transform itself into more threatening collective agent. Repeatedly, through conventional and social media, Mistrić's friends and other sympathizers invited their fellow Sarajevans to come out and join them. In the process, they managed to recruit different kinds of help. Tram drivers expressed their solidarity with the barricade by putting up fliers in the

windows of moving cars that likewise bemoaned the absence of the strong hand of the law. The paroles demanded: “Return old glory to Zenica penitentiary”—the infamous socialist era prison. Other messages expressed regret for the moment when old school “milicija” became “policija”—or when the unscrupulous socialist police [*milicija*] became a Westernized police force.

Despite these ingenious moments, the crowd itself remained small, sometimes reaching the maximum of a few hundred people. Most of the people who stood there did so out of solidarity, or because they had a history of participation in the 2008 protests. Some walked up from adjacent neighborhoods or on the way to school or work. Others showed up there in early morning hours, after screenings and parties. The ongoing film festival brought many visitors, stars and journalists into the city, but it did not serve the protesters well. By cutting off traffic, the protesters thought they were staging an effective interruption. But the micro geography of their protest, which was a few miles removed from the center and old town where the rest of the city partied, prevented the barricade from grabbing the attention of the city’s residents. Many Sarajevans were simply enjoying the once-a-year week of cosmetic transformation ushered in by the Film Festival. The city was also half empty, as many of its residents were out of town on vacation. The final disappointment among the crowd came when the fantasized cancellation of a major concert of Dubioza Kolektiv, a prominent reggae band whose politically charged songs provided the soundtrack to the 2008 protests, did not take place. The leaders of the band, who were publicly affiliated with DOSTA, never came to see the protesters or supported them in any direct way.

To make matters worse, despite the initial outrage, the barricade was rapidly losing its novelty and some of its original support. Some passers-by (particularly the drivers) did not care much for the methods employed, and subsequently deemed the protest a train-wreck and a disaster. Random people with whom I talked, objected to the location of the barricade—why did the protestors not block a government building or the police station, or even a road more people used? What was the point of this anyway, and where were the established protesters and activists, to make something “concrete” out of the circus?

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In fact, members of Citizen Action and the activists of Dosta never left the site, guarding the barricade in shifts, even spending nights outside and continuously offering all manner of logistical help. They provided materials for protest signs, megaphones, and other paraphernalia, making the neighborhood know they would do everything to help them carry out their plans until the end. Individual activists expressed their solidarity through their unremitting presence, or small gifts of food and supplies that they brought to the intersection.

But despite these concrete forms of help, ever since the very first encounter, leaders of both organizations were very reluctant to step in and provide ideological or strategic guidance. Darjan, at that moment the acting president of Citizen Action, was hesitant, even after extensive deliberation among the organization’s members, to offer anything beyond unconditional logistical help. This was neither for the lack of interest or hope: like most other activists, he wished nothing more but for that moment to be the beginning of new mass mobilization. But he also feared that excessive involvement of familiar activist figures would make such a development impossible. Two scenarios seemed especially worrisome: either Mistrić’s friends would be hostile to formal activists stepping in and taking over their intervention, or the unforgiving Sarajevan public would accuse the organization of instrumentalizing grief. These were legitimate concerns: a few subsequent news analyses of the barricade protest suggested this

latter set of accusations would be imminent.

Within the organization proper, there were also many different opinions about what to do about this apparent moment of opportunity. Some members actively advocated “agenda setting,” pointing out that without structure and a plan, this would become just another small protest destined for doom. Others thought the neighborhood genuinely needed help and guidance, and that it was the organization’s responsibility to provide it. But there were other things to consider as well. What the barricade needed most was popular support and participation of a greater number of Sarajevo’s residents. Because of this, some activists, for example Darjan, insisted that for the barricade to mobilize, it had to remain an authentic expression of the people’s will, or the neighborhood out of which it grew. This position was not simply a reflection of Darjan’s democratic spirit or his overly romantic conception of activism and the street. In practice he believed that the most important to success of this mobilization was the public perception of the protest, as a genuine, sincere expression of popular will. Sincerity was crucial if one was to take on and “work with” the widespread postwar skepticism about transformative capacities of political engagement. In his mind, it was this sincerity [*iskrenost*] of intentions that made the 2008 protests possible. Hence, preserving the authenticity of affect and purpose remained equally if not more important a year later.

Therefore, instead of being a sign of incompetence, activists’ reluctance reflected instead a heightened awareness of the political terrain and its limits. What’s more, Darjan’s hesitant refusal of the “managerial moment” suggested that for him and his collaborators, activist practice could not be reduced to a simple strategic agenda. Instead, it constituted a mode of engagement with the world, one bound by a distinct set of criteria for what counts for a proper response to a moment of possibility. To practice restraint in a situation one might be expected to seize, suggested a different kind of an ethical project, one that privileged relationality over opportunity, sincerity over success.

Nevertheless, Citizen Action tried to help in other ways, namely by creating a context of debate and discussion. For example, anticipating that the government would fail to meaningfully tackle the problem of public safety, activists composed a sharp tongued, ironic press statement, where they asked whether citizens would be issued firearm permits or allowed to form militias for their own protection. The sarcastic tone of the letter was lost on some journalists and newspaper editors, who reported the letter as a list of serious proposals. In fact, the letter explicitly criticized the effects of decentralization and weakening of major disciplinary and regulatory institutions, arguing for strengthening of the state rather than privatization of security. The institutions of law did not escape criticism either. Several days later, Citizen Action organized another symbolic action in front of the office of the prosecutor, where they laid out another red carpet, with the message “Festival of Death.”

But, without a clear plan, leadership or strategy, the barricade rushed towards its inevitable end. The final epilogue to the story arrived with the arrest of the suspects. After several days on the run, Herak and Vuk were soon caught in Croatia, in the town of Omiš, when they attempted to get out a residency permit. They were immediately brought back to Sarajevo, and over the course of the next year, tried and convicted. Amar’s friends celebrated their arrest on the streets, but were not quite ready to abandon their barricade. Nevertheless, they reached a compromise with the local government to move away from the intersection and set their protest on the patch of grassy area separating the road from the high-rise buildings. There, they set up a camp, bringing out small pieces of furniture, tents, and a giant flat screen TV, without which the whole site would have looked like a nomadic encampment. Other protesters and I went there

every day, at times bringing food, snacks and soda drinks to support the logistics of the effort. One time, I brought my friend, a sociologist from Zagreb who came to see films at the festival. We arrived there, as if we were guests in someone's living room. People camped out under a giant billboard advertising Bosnian Telecom, smoking and making small talk. Political aspects of the gathering had given way to the most prosaic moments of sociality.

Underneath one of the tents, we found two notebooks with thick, plastic covers. One was titled as the book of mourning, where passersby could leave their messages of sympathy and support for the family. The other one was more unusual; on its first page, stood a telling title: "Petition to the Cantonal and Federal Government demanding..." The title was left unfinished—its authors never figured out or came to the consensus about what it was that they wished to petition the government for. But inside were hundreds of signatures of different people, in proper form, including their ID numbers, and other personal information. At some point, the two books had also gotten mixed up, so that the book of mourners contained some petition signatures, and vice versa. I gasped at this site; the peculiar mix of proper form and utter disarray made me simultaneously sad and hopeful. By contrast, my friend from Zagreb became angry, criticizing the entire site as tragic and ultimately not political at all. What did these people want, he asked. All of this was a moment of prepolitical confusion—there is no activism without ideology.

My colleague's words in some ways echoed the sorts of criticisms other academics, analysts and commentators as well as the opponents of the protests, invoked during the 2008 mobilizations. The protests and their leaders lacked in organizational skills, articulated goals, ideological orientation and many other ingredients to be taken seriously. Even more experienced activists appeared lost and incompetent, failing to give form to an amorphous set of demands and the assembly of bodies.

But one might cast a differently hued light on the possibilities and enclosures that the barricade represented. The unnamed demands seemed to me not a sign of the failure of political imagination, but rather a signal of the acute awareness that such a demand, if it was to be sincere, could not be a simple demand at all.<sup>1</sup> If stated, that demand would entail a complete unraveling of the bastard-child that is the post-Dayton state, in which spilling someone's brains because he refused to serve you a drink becomes logical and viable, forgettable and inconsequential. To live in the carcass of the demised regime, and between the aporias of a new one, at some point necessitates leaving certain rubrics blank.

In light of such limits to knowledge and articulation, it makes sense that the petition and the expressions of condolence can merge at moments into the same thing—because both rely on a particular conception of what it means to live together, to care and to be answerable. The people who signed a petition without a list of grievances or demands, giving the most intimate of their personal information, were not dupes. They were neighbors who understood and deeply identified with the predicament, and who responded not to the substance of the call, but rather, to its very existence.

The "prepolitical" label dismisses such situated forms of knowledge and affect, surrendering them to the vocabularies of transitology, deeming them immature, unfinished and lacking. Unfortunately, few critics using such terms reflect on the extent to which these criteria for evaluating proper forms of political action had been naturalized through the processes of postwar "democratization" and practices of policy analysis. The language of "prepolitical"

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<sup>1</sup> Veena Das speaks of a similar inability to name, that "which died when autonomous citizens of India were simultaneously born as monsters."

constitutes a particular kind of injury, a denial of coevalness (Fabian 1983), which casts alternative forms of life as throwaways to a different, archaic time.

Yet one could also read these so-called “pre-political” forms as a type of “politics of not yet” which places emphasis on the process of emergence, and not on the one of retardation or stagnation. In order to sacrifice a moment of political possibility provided by the barricade, Darjan acted on belief in a transformative futurity, no matter how distant, remote and out of reach it may be. A politics of not yet embraces restraint and doubt as necessary aspects of activist practice, precisely because it is a politics that does not wish to forfeit the future. It is a politics suited for those times and places where skeptics, despite and because of themselves, hold on to the dreams of a revolution.

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*Politics of Impasse* has demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the state-level politics in Bosnia has entirely been overdetermined by the conditions of the Dayton brokered peace, the hegemonic grip of nationalism, and the multiplicity of—at best dissipated and at worst mutually hostile—visions of the future. But it has also shown the unintended consequences of this political suspension, and the vitality of the forms of political thought and action devised to respond to the constraints, as well as possibilities, of this new life-world. It is not that citizens of Bosnia have been paralyzed by the grip of political apathy; if the interruptions examined in this dissertation, the use of tranquilizers to watch the news, the level of anxiety about the future, the extent of commitment to children or the last haunting image of these two books, can teach us anything at all, is that Bosnians’ relationship to the political future is marked by a surplus, rather than lack of care. Moreover, the ethnographic narratives in this thesis make known that the line of separation between activism and resignation is neither very long or very sturdy; even the most ardent activists go through periods of intense disenchantment and withdrawal. These two contrasting orientations represent also the two opposing pulls that characterize this animated suspension: the simultaneous existence of the enduring fantasy of a world-renewing, violent transformation and the apparent inability (or is it conscious unwillingness?) to make this scenario actionable. A meaningful transformation has not happened in Bosnia in part because the risk of dismantling things remains far too great, especially in the absence of a viable alternative model that could channel sedimented dissatisfactions and anxieties toward reinvention rather than another moment of destruction.

Finally, the occasion of the conclusion invites one final reflection on the contribution of this thesis to the anthropological thinking about the contemporary political moment. No doubt, given the spirit of the times, many readers may find the formulation of “impasse,” as well suited to Bosnia as to, for example, the bipartisan deadlock that has frustrated the American electorate for years. Nevertheless, since the fieldwork for this research has been completed, momentous popular uprisings have taken place, which offer a vision of a dynamic, rather than paralyzed and embittered political future. Recent mass mobilizations in the Arab world, and the wave of Occupy protests across the globe, have also reinvigorated scholarly, and especially anthropological interest in popular and activist politics (see *American Ethnologist* 39:1, especially Abu-Lughod 2012; Collins 2012; Hirschkind 2012; Winegar 2012; in addition to Elyachar and Winegar 2012; Juris and Razsa 2012; Razsa 2012; Dzenovska and Arenas 2012). Yet, the attention directed at these events has also helped sideline the fact that in most of the world, sustained acts of mass protest are extraordinary, rather than commonplace events. What’s

more, the spectacular nature of the Arab Spring and OWS, their transnational reach and multiplying effect have also left outside of the scope of investigation those places where these movements did not produce a ripple effect—even though they might have been expected to. In Bosnia, neither of the great waves of protests in 2010 or 2011 managed to inspire the masses to action—regardless of the fact that a mere year earlier, the public buzzed with dramatic speculations and ambitious hopes of an impending mass uprising with which I began this dissertation.

It seems silly lump all of these mobilizations into the same bucket, given their different trajectories and the distinct circumstances that made them possible. But I find interesting that despite of their surprising and momentous nature, many of these protests reflected similar tensions to those that I have described through my ethnographic investigation of Bosnia: a mix of desire and skepticism, hope and reluctance, simultaneous drive towards change and anticipation of failure or disappointment. Even before the protesters in Egypt had ousted Mubarak, some of them were already professing doubt that their dreams of a better future would be realized. This sense of cautiousness, of living and acting politically out of an “already disappointed” kind of hope, marks the emergence of a new sense of historical imagination, one centered not on the potentials but on the limits of political action to transform our complicated, heterogamous and in many ways inert worlds. Along with the notion of programmatic politics and ideologically driven projects, we may have relinquished too our modern philosophies of historical progress. Out of the passing of the dreams of utopia in both East and the West (Buck-Morss 2002), out of this new *postsocialist* condition, a new kind of philosophy of history appears to have emerged, one whose mode of critique is skepticism. It remains to be seen to what forms of politics this new disposition will give rise.

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