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Future conditional: Precarious lives, strange loyalties and ambivalent subjects of post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina

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On a warm summer morning, as we sat in the commercial centre of Jajce under the shade of a sapphire-blue parasol advertising Bavaria beer, my thirty-year-old friend “Mirna”¹ described to me what it meant to suddenly and unexpectedly lose her job. Just before my 2013 return trip to this central Bosnian town where I have been conducting ethnographic research for years,² she wrote that she had been fired from her previous position in one of the subsidiary metallurgical enterprises now owned by a large foreign firm. A longer conversation about this would have to wait for our reunion over a cup of coffee. As we waited for our macchiato in outdoor seating area of our favourite cafe, Mirna’s recollection of the initial shock gave way to her burgeoning plan for finding a new job. Its very first step involved becoming a member of HDZ, the chief Croat nationalist party in town.³

This swift declaration caught me by surprise. In light of her personal history and reputation, she was perhaps the last person in Jajce from whom I would have expected to hear such an announcement. As a child of a Bosniak mother and a Croat father, Mirna passed neither as an uncomplicated Croat nor a convincing nationalist. Her mother’s postwar activism in a rival social democratic party was well known, as was the fact that the “politically unfit” Croat side of her family suffered all kinds of discrimination at the hand of the same nationalist party after the war. Hence, it was difficult to imagine Mirna as a formal member of HDZ, even if such an affiliation might result in a solution of her current employment problems.

Still, Mirna has always had a pragmatic side. Acutely aware of her political and economic surroundings, she had made a rare and significant transition through several different jobs, each one of which had been better than the last. Her relative success in Jajce’s limited job market resulted out of fearless ambition, rather than political connections, which other townspeople commonly used to land coveted public-sector jobs. But even for Mirna, who had worked for NGOs and private firms, forging such connections now seemed a necessity. She was tired of dubious local businessmen; the latest one fired her because she dared to challenge an idle employee who was also the boss’s relation. “Perhaps it is time for me to work in the one place where I haven’t yet,” she offered, “the municipal government!” However, to get a coveted government appointment, Mirna needed the backing of a very strong political party, like the HDZ, which had greater support than the social democrats and more leverage in decision-making. Despite fierce competition, Mirna was confident about her chances in light of positive signals received from the party leadership and her “new connections” (*veze*).

But a few months after I returned to the US, I received an update from Mirna that she was leaving Jajce to join her sister who had been living in Norway for many years. This was to be a permanent move, only this time, there was no carefully laid out plan, no promises of employment and no pragmatic moves to be made. Mirna would enrol in a language-learning program and work her way up from there. In this delicate moment, I could not bring myself to ask what happened to her previous plan and hope of landing an appointment in the municipal agency. But in some ways, I did not need to: Mirna was not the first, nor will she be the last person in Jajce who tried to make her way through the precarious postwar economy by shifting her political alignment. Nor was she the only one for whom such moves failed to bear fruit.

¹ The names are pseudonyms, used to protect confidentiality. I have also changed minor details, in order to make individuals less easily identifiable in the town proper.

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³ Hrvatska demokratska zajednica or Croatian Democratic Union (hereafter HDZ) is the oldest, post-1990 Croatian nationalist party in the region. During the war, HDZ in Bosnia was the main organizing force behind Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane or HVO), which in 1993 engaged in armed struggle with the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A postwar conundrum

I open this essay with an ethnographic moment that is at once a product of an intimate exchange and an exemplar of the dilemmas facing many residents of postwar Bosnia, especially those that live in small, deindustrialized, and politically divided towns. Mirna's situation—her waning employment prospects, a botched plan to navigate local political hierarchies and her ultimate Scandinavian departure—offers an illuminating window into the precarious lives and odd affiliations engendered by the contradictions of Bosnia's eighteen year old peace. The surprising if unproductive pragmatism with which Mirna initially approached the potential value of her political association should also lead us to ask a series of related questions. What made Mirna, and as I explain, thousands like her, think that such a shift in her political membership might open up a more secure future? How did political loyalty *become imagined* as a currency, a vehicle for paving one's way into a more promising tomorrow? Under what conditions did postwar residents of Bosnia such as Mirna, come to see the once problematic choices as the most viable ones? And if we were to take their predicaments seriously, how would our analytical approach to nationalist politics change?

In what follows, I demonstrate how declining economic prospects and rising joblessness have—instead of delegitimizing—actually strengthened the very same political forces responsible both for the devastating war and for the ensuing political paralysis. Dayton-designed administrative organization, characterised by ethnicization of territory and complex forms of power sharing, has not only fortified but has also remade dominant political parties into major agents of socioeconomic redistribution. In economically depressed areas of Bosnia, this political restructuring has made party membership—either official or informal—both an important vehicle of social mobility and a tactic for making communities more governable under the logic of Dayton Accords.

Shining light on these emergent rationalities demonstrates how Bosnia's long standing political elites, despite their well documented ineptitude and corruption, manage to keep themselves in power by manipulating the distribution of jobs, contracts and other socio-economic resources on which their constituents depend. I argue that this homebred form of political clientelism—which usually involves exchange of electoral support and political membership for various benefits—constitutes one of the central pillars of post-Dayton regime. It helps keep the system in place all the while making it appear immutable and totalizing, and therefore capable of absorbing of any and all dissent. Yet, as this chapter clarifies, the complex turn taking combined with the growing shortage of resources that can be distributed, also makes *governance through patronage* extremely difficult to sustain. As competition among and within parties increases, so do the numbers of broken promises, deferrals and crushed hopes. Failure of patrons to deliver in turn leads to new kinds of speculation that sow mistrust and greater political fragmentation, but also feed the rising popular indignation that animated, for example, the massive civic protests in February of 2014.

Although the analysis that follows is primarily ethnographic, my framing questions echo those posed by the anthropological literature on the role that privatization of state owned resources played in remapping of power relations in former socialist countries (e.g. Ledeneva 1998, 2006; Humphrey 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; also Verdery 1996; Caldwell 2002, Dunn 2007). This work has not only demonstrated how liberalization of postsocialist markets helped pave the way for the emergence of new politico-economic oligarchies, but also how such processes created new forms of social discipline and entailed transformations in the nature of postsocialist personhood. The intensification of political patronage in present-day Bosnia casts new light on the mutual interpenetration of political belonging and economic exigency in the aftermath of war, postsocialism and foreign intervention. From Bosnia's unique vantage point, this analysis expands the conversation about postsocialist privatization by showing how it does not always lead to market-driven governance or commonly anticipated forms of state withdrawal. In Bosnia, as the size of the public sector swells, its various segments find themselves under the control of specific political interests, which can then use their control of budgetary funds as a means of garnishing political support. I argue that these processes cannot be understood as mere "corruption"

resulting out of an incomplete transition, or worse, as remnants of a communist past (c.f. Abente Brun and Diamond 2014; Cook 2014; Marten 2014). Instead, they should be seen as original responses and novel adaptations of existing social bonds in an ever-evolving political context.

As it shifts between analysing micro politics of Jajce and dissecting national politics, this chapter posits problems of unemployment and political manipulation of hiring as the central sites of both political mobilization and demobilization in contemporary BH. The two sections that follow analyse how the postwar economic decline made internal privatization of state-owned resources into a key tool for securing popular complicity with the dominant political agenda. While my focus is on Jajce, I subsequently discuss the role similar kinds of patronage play across the country. At the end, I offer another ethnographic portrait, which complements and places Mirna's in a different perspective. Resisting the temptation to read Mirna's ill-fated strategy naive or foolish, I show instead how it came to *make sense* amidst the perceived individual and collective futurelessness.

The two faces of Jajce: past glory & insecure future of Bosnia's rust belt

The town of Jajce, my ethnographic setting, is located about 135 kilometres northwest of Sarajevo. Encircled by a confluence of two emerald green rivers, Vrbas and Pliva, Jajce has been built on a porous hill made out of tufa deposits, on the top of which sits a medieval stone fortress. The town's picturesque character remains unspoiled even as the moving road reveals a large industrial yard marked by several protruding smoke stacks. The yard and its structures, now repainted in a bright shade of blue and red, are all that remains of Elektrobosna, a ferrosilicium-producing plant that was once the single most important economic force in town. After the war, this conglomerate was divided into several different subsidiaries through a devastating process of privatization.⁴ The new firms that emerged out of this process now employ a fraction of the workforce that used to work in the socialist era factory.

The architectural setting of the town brings into relief the secession of political transformations that shaped local history. Although it was established in 14th century as the coronation site of the late-medieval Bosnian Kingdom, Jajce has been known more recently as the town that hosted the Second Congress of "AVNOJ" where in 1943 leaders of resistance and future architects of socialist Yugoslavia brought into being a new federal republic. As "Yugoslavia's birthplace," Jajce used to be the third most visited tourist spot in Bosnia, having become an essential stop on fieldtrips and excursions of Yugoslav pupils.

The 1992-95 war in Bosnia left Jajce with scars of two consecutive military campaigns and waves of ethnic cleansing. In October 1992, Serb army took the control of Jajce from the joined Bosniak-Croat forces after a brief but intense period of fighting. At that time, most of the Croat and Bosniak population fled Jajce, either to nearby towns, neighbouring Croatia, or Western and Northern Europe. This large-scale displacement then prevented a direct military confrontation between the local Croats and Muslims when their tenuous union broke down in 1993. At that time, growing political differences, and a possible pact between Croatian president Tuđman and Serb leader Milošević to divide up Bosnian territory (the so-called "Karadorđevo Agreement"), begot a series of brutal military confrontations in Herzegovina and other parts of central Bosnia. Months of fighting between former allies did not end until the Clinton administration forced the two sides to restore their alliance through the "Washington Agreement." This pact became the basis for the future cantonal organization of the Muslim-Croat federation, one of two territorial entities introduced by Dayton Accords that comprises the Bosnian state today.

Since Jajce had been during this crucial period under the control of Serb army, the town escaped the fate of many similarly ethnically mixed towns, which today remain sites of extreme political friction. Still, relations between local Croats and Bosniaks did not greet the end of war unscathed. In August of 1995, Croat forces took control of Jajce as a part of much larger operation "Storm" (Oluja) that pushed

⁴ Sarajevo based Centre for investigative journalism—CIN has done extensive reporting on the process of privatization of Elektrobosna. See here: <http://www.cin.ba/en/prica-1-aukcija/>.

Serb forces towards the town of Banja Luka. This victory enabled the local Croat Defence Council to take political control and subsequently obstruct the return of Bosniaks and other non-Croats, in hopes of preserving the newly established Croat majority. It was during this period that local Croats and Bosniaks truly began to clash—over the right of return, property repossession, and re-institution to pre-war posts and jobs (see also Toal and Dahlman 2011; Dahlman and Toal 2004). Under the pressure of OSCE and OHR, Croat Defence Force had to gradually allow for return of non-Croat refugees—a process that eventually lead to Bosniaks re-emerging as the largest and most dominant ethnic group in the municipality (for details see Toal and Dahlman 2005: 449). However, despite the fact that Bosniak nationalist politicians have held the mayoral post for a decade, local Croat nationalists remain a formidable and important political force.

Jajce's residents frequently emphasize the uniqueness wartime history and local Croat-Bosniak relations. That "Jajce is not *as* divided" has become an odd point of local pride. Occasionally, Bosniaks would complain about the difficulties involved in their return to Jajce, while local Croats expressed their fears about becoming a politically vulnerable minority. Days of socialist-era "brotherhood and unity" were in many ways long gone: like in many other "divided towns", Jajce's kindergartens and elementary schools are now ethnically segregated. Nonetheless, due to shrinking generations, previously separated pupils reunite under the same roof once again at the high school level, which makes possible certain kinds of spontaneous integration. By the time I arrived in 2006, local cafes and other small businesses were for the most part integrated (even if certain preferences still prevailed).

The town, however, has other serious problems. Despite the fact its pre-war population has been reduced by nearly half, unofficial estimates place rates of unemployment as high as 40%. Shortage of jobs has forced residents to emigrate in search of temporary work in the EU states, including Slovenia and Croatia (for comparison with Tuzla, see Jašarević 2014). Rising poverty is mitigated by the fact most families own their homes and apartments either through inheritance or a voucher-based process of postwar privatization. Still, many such homes sit empty, bearing witness to the massive wartime exodus. Many remaining households still rely on remittances from family members abroad. In the town proper, there is a small private sector, mostly consisting of mid-size technical companies that employ a few dozens of local craftsmen. There is also a modest service economy, which encompasses hotels, cafes, supermarkets, and corner stores, and employs an army of underpaid workers whose salaries are routinely late. For a while, *Jajčani* (residents of Jajce) hoped that renewal of the local tourism sector would lead to a much-needed influx of investment. During my long-term fieldwork in 2008/9, Jajce's ill-fated candidacy for the UNESCO World Heritage Site list represented something of a panacea, a way of imagining the town's economic revitalization on the wings of heritage and eco-tourist industries. This was an appealing, yet still very distant future that could not help those presently looking for work.

Meanwhile, the most desirable jobs remain those tied to the government budgets, which besides the local government finance state-owned service providers (schools, hospitals, sanitation, etc.). Jobs in these institutions are among the most coveted, not because of the pay or opportunities for advancement, but because they are perceived to be the most respectable and secure. However, such jobs are nearly always given out as rewards for political loyalty to members of various political parties, which form the town government. After a position becomes available, it is almost always clear which party has a turn in naming the successor to that post. Local residents also understand that specific institutions such as the theatre, post office, library and museums are each under the control of one or at most two nationalist parties. Local political parties control this process in Jajce so tightly that I have never even heard rumours of, let alone seen actual proof of jobs being given out as a result of a monetary payment.⁵

In such a situation, young people, such as Mirna, face a formidable challenge of finding appropriate employment. When I spoke to the director of the local bureau for employment, she confessed

⁵ By contrast, I have heard these accusations quite a lot in my other field sites like Sarajevo and Tuzla, and to a lesser extent, Banja Luka. Sometimes, parents give up their severance and retirement packages to ensure their children will inherit their post. Other times, people use their savings from a temporary job abroad to purchase a position in one of the more prosperous state-owned firms.

that there is no space for new workers in town. At her admission, youth had to wait for older workers to leave their posts, either through retirement or death. The situation was even worse for those without degrees, who often had to take on insecure and badly paid service jobs, which many in the older generation perceived as demeaning. Things were especially complicated for women. I learned this through the case of Amila, a recently divorced single mother, whose parents disliked the fact she had accepted a job as a bartender in one of the popular locales.

The lack of desirable jobs placed many young people in Jajce in a dilemma. Some, such as my occasional interlocutor Katarina, could rely on a combination of family and political connections to eventually land a job. But even for those well-connected rewards came slowly. Katarina, for example, waited for years to land on the voting list of candidates for the municipal parliament, which eventually made her a councilwoman. Others found shelter in the local non-governmental organizations, a few of which have had success in securing access to external funding. Such grants periodically enable them to hire motivated town youths on short-term contracts. However, as international interest in peace building moves elsewhere, such funding has become more difficult to come by. The once independent associations now have to reorient themselves towards the local government. To echo the words of Nihad, a NGO activist, the same organizations that are supposed to play a role in the system of democratic checks and balances find themselves becoming clients of the state.

Since the 2008 global economic crisis, the finite nature of local resources has been increasingly apparent, both through the withdrawal of funding and the decreasing numbers of available jobs. This has shaped local community dynamics in very specific ways. During my fieldwork, I found residents of Jajce to be uncharacteristically hesitant about openly criticizing the local government. People I interviewed routinely asked me to turn off my voice recorder when they wanted to speak about the municipal authorities. This cautiousness especially marked my interactions with government employees and people close to political leadership. Even during informal conversations, this subset of interlocutors never dared name specific individuals when speaking about past instances of violence or corruption. Yet, when it came to their peers, many people were openly critical about their past and current confidants, especially those they perceived had failed to share the spoils of their political connections. Alliances between kindred groups often turned sour because they started to see each other as competition. In fact, because of these shifting coalitions, during my repeated returns, I often found myself having to first re-discover who was now friends with whom. The fickle nature of intimate and professional relationships suggested that ethnic divisions were only a small aspect of a bigger picture. Jajce was indeed divided, but not in the way outsiders—both international and Sarajevo-based observers—assumed.

Many of these cleavages emerged out of rumours and speculations about *the way things worked* rather than out of concrete proof. Predictions often turned out to be wrong and plans seldom worked out. Frequently, more than one member of the party was promised the same position; the awards usually went to those that had the *right combination* of political, familial and personal ties. After years of waiting, final decisions could be devastating to those who did not get promised positions. And since informal agreements often did not materialize, some peoples started to repeatedly change their political affiliation. Those who could not or did not want to align themselves with the big nationalists tried their luck in smaller, reformist parties. In Jajce, political membership had indeed been democratized, but not in the way postwar democracy promoters hoped. In contrast to the communist period, when belonging to the Party was expected only of high ranking officers and managers, in today's Jajce, even aspiring janitors find themselves in search of the most salient political affiliation.⁶

Postsocialist unemployment, popular de/mobilization and the new political economy

⁶ Entanglements between unemployment and popular de/mobilization have an important history in the region, which has been chronicled by a number of socialist era scholars (e.g. Cohen 1989; Andelić 2003). The distinct geopolitical position of Yugoslavia and relatively early processes of economic liberalization lead to the unprecedented presence of unemployment in a socialist state that was supposed to guarantee work for everyone (e.g. Woodward 1995; Zukin 1975). My ongoing research affirms Woodward's insistence on the crucial link between unemployment, the rise of nationalism and political disintegration in former Yugoslavia, suggesting these links remain important in the post-intervention period.

Jajce is not the only place in postwar Bosnia facing these conundrums. Today, approximately seven key political parties in the country (all but one self-professedly ethno-nationalist) control not only the “not yet” privatized capital, but also use their control of state budgets to mitigate steadily rising popular dissent. The use of public funds to buy political support takes form of the expansion of social categories eligible for state support, bestowing of organizational grants, fixing bids for state contracts and perhaps most importantly, manipulating hiring appointments. To make sense of Mirna’s original plan, one must understand the mechanics of this new redistributive politics, and its significance amidst widespread economic uncertainty.

In 2013, formal rates of unemployment in postwar Bosnia stood at estimated 27%, at least according to Bosnian Statistical Agency. This number does not distinguish between major urban centres and deindustrialized provinces where unemployment is even higher. What’s more, these statistics simply account for the percentage of job seekers—they do not take into consideration those people who have simply stopped looking for work. It is also difficult to know what percentage of people actually work in the informal sector, or may be employed under precarious, limited time contracts. Nor do these numbers say much about the variety of arrangements that often exist between employers and their employees.⁷

Political wrangling, shortage of investment, decaying infrastructure, and lack of cohesive strategy for economic development have slowed down the postwar economic recovery. In place of large socialist era industrial conglomerates that used to employ tens of thousands of people, the government itself is now the single biggest employer, thanks to the proliferation of governmental bodies in charge of protecting ethno-national interests. Postwar reforms were supposed to guarantee that hiring processes would be impartial, fair and follow the rule of law. In theory, all hiring for government jobs should be done by the Civil Service Agency, which puts out calls for applications and must conduct rigorous assessment of qualified candidates. However, according to the journalists at the Centre for Investigative Reporting, nearly all such contests are rigged. Specific candidates with the right political and family ties almost always rise to the top—a claim supported by numerous other media reports of politicians’ children winning entrepreneurial grants and coveted spots in public administration.⁸ Aside from helping their own progeny, political parties have a stake in appointing their own people in order to direct agendas of specific government agencies.⁹

Similar kinds of nepotistic hiring and political patronage are at work in the firms that remain partly state-owned. Political parties treat such companies as war bounty—as a result, each major enterprise today is under the auspices of one, or possibly two political camps. Managers and high-ranking officers of such firms are almost without exception close to one of the dominant political parties. But the problem is much deeper. Preferential hiring has been used so much, that transportation firms, electrical distributors, mobile communications providers, hospitals, and some schools, have an unsustainable surplus of workers (usually low-level). At this point, given the overall precarious economic situation in postwar Bosnia, downsizing such companies would only produce new problems, because so many families in postwar Bosnia depend on these jobs. Hence, the situation that I first described in Jajce is not much different in much larger cities, where astounding numbers of people also rely on budgetary funds to make their living. However, in the capital, where the labor economy is larger, such association tends to only be necessary for civic servants, high-ranking employees of state owned enterprises.

⁷ For example, during a particularly difficult period, an employer might terminate his workers’ contracts in order to stop paying for their social and medical insurance, but keep employing them informally.

⁸ For most recent news about this kind of preferential hiring, see “Objavljeni rezultati Konkursa-Najbolja kandidatkinja ćerka Nebojše Radmanovića” published by portal BUKA (6yka) from Banja Luka on August 8, 2018 (available at: <http://www.6yka.com/novost/61626/objavljeni-rezultati-konkursa-najbolja-kandidatkinja-ćerka-nebojse-radmanovica>) and “Sin Željke Cvijanović dobio posao u Elektroprenosu BiH, ona u tome ne vidi ništa sporno” published by Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje*, on July 13, 2014 (available at: <http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/sin-zeljke-cvijanovic-dobio-posao-u-elektroprenosu-bih-ona-u-tome-ne-vidi-nista-sporno>)

⁹ In other cases, parties in power change laws in order to be better able to control what kinds of candidates gets hired into certain kinds of positions. For example, the government of Milorad Dodik a few years ago changed the rules for hiring professional police. This has widely been interpreted as an attempt to turn law enforcement in RS into an extended arm of Dodik’s party.

The nature of the postwar labor market has important consequences for how large segments of Bosnian populations act as voters and citizens. In the course of my research among grassroots activists, I have seen instances where political parties, both nationalist and non-nationalist, have attempted to bring into the fold leaders and organizers of protests by offering them government jobs and grants. In 2008, at least three political activists I spoke to reported losing their public sector jobs because they were “caught” protesting on TV. Such moments brought into relief just how important the labor market and the politics of hiring has become to securing political complicity and eliminating popular dissent.

When large-scale civic demonstrations began again in February 2014, problems of long-term unemployment emerged on the top of protestors’ grievances. Yet, soon after, rumors began circulating that leaders of certain political parties actually sponsored the protests. This speculation revealed how pervasive the expectation of political patronage has become: many believe that any and all political acts reflect the will and interests of some political party. What’s more, in the aftermath of the uprising, some of the former protestors seemed to have literally “sold out” by deciding to vie for power in the October 2014 elections under the aegis of various old and new parties.¹⁰

The dominant interpretive frame for such forms of (re)politicization is that of opportunism, and the reaction is almost always that of moral condemnation. In an impassioned critique of this kind of partnering with political parties, one disgruntled protester described such “willing” acts of incorporation as “insane.” Relying on a standard critique of false consciousness, he offered that these people were working against their better [long-term] interest. Though I certainly remain sympathetic to this critique and the modality of affect on which it draws, I want to trouble the moral righteousness with which the Bosnian public so frequently demands that individual citizens must stay true and uncompromised, even in the face of widespread corruption and economic uncertainty. To do this, I offer ethnographic portrait of Zora, one of my long-time ethnographic interlocutors in Jajce, a complicated but in certain ways very consistent woman, whose story helps illuminate the struggles encountered by ordinary people who did not “sell out.” I purposefully contrast her story of long-term precarity to Mirna’s, in order to show what sometimes happens to people who never secure for themselves strong institutional and political support.

Life and death in the embrace of postwar market

When I met her in 2008, Zora was a forty-something, energetic and charismatic woman, with a generous disposition and a number of strong opinions. In Jajce, she was instantly identifiable as one of the few Serb returnees who came back after a massive October 1995 exodus which followed the arrival of Croatian troops. At that time, Zora and her family left everything behind and sought safety up north, in the territories controlled by the Serb army. For several years, they lived in a small town on the banks of river Sava, where Zora and her husband took up hard and demeaning jobs.

When the nationalist municipal government began allowing the gradual return of other non-Croat residents of Jajce in the early 2000s, Zora, who had already had enough of life, as she put it, “kao podstanar” (as a sub-tenant), decided to come back home. Her children and husband initially opposed the idea; her husband had been a soldier in the Serb army and the family feared retribution. In the end, Zora came back to find her house still standing, but overgrown with thick shrubbery, which she herself cut down with rudimentary tools. The first months were not easy, since was alone and occasionally a target of Croat intimidation tactics. Zora also found herself unemployed. Although she once worked as a sales associate, the war left her without an easily convertible skill set that would help her make a living in war devastated Jajce. In order to provide for the family, Zora’s husband found temporary employment in Slovenia, where he worked at construction sites that proliferated during a short-lived economic boom. Zora’s daughter Jelena worked a series of jobs in the local slot machine joints, cafes and hotels, while her son made a living as a musician outside of town. Because of the informal and impermanent nature of their employment, nobody in the family had proper access to still-nationalized medical insurance.

¹⁰ See “Kako je politika pojela radnički bunt u Tuzli” by Maja Nikolić, in *Slobodna Evropa* on August 7, 2014 (available at: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/kako-je-politika-pojela-radnicki-bunt-u-tuzli/26517162.html>)

Instead of attempting to find a low-paying job in one of the local stores, Zora instead decided to pursue the production of natural and organic food. A long-term enthusiast of natural remedies, she saw the future of her family and community in the return to land. While these plans certainly dovetailed with top down narratives of economic development, for people like Zora, rewards were small and slow in coming. While patiently ploughing her way into a more sustainable future, Zora worked on resuscitating her social ties. But this process was not without friction, since Zora had quite a few unpopular political opinions. For example, she was an unapologetic proponent of some of the most dubious of Serb nationalist narratives about the war. She openly blamed Croats for “starting the war” and Muslims for grossly “exaggerating” the number of victims in Srebrenica. She would offer these views to whoever would listen, apparently unconcerned about the impact her words would have on interpersonal relationships. I was not the only one puzzled by these behaviours. Close Bosniak friends of Zora and her family spoke of their frustrations with her interpretations of historical events, which one of them called “blatant lies.”

Whether Zora’s views were true or false mattered far less in her situation than whether or not they were politically damaging to her standing in the community. In an atmosphere marked by a flood of whispers about people’s “real” motives and allegiances, where it sometimes took me years to get people to speak candidly to me about the local political situation, Zora’s earnest if disturbing speech left people, including this ethnographer, stunned and stumped. What was surprising was not so much the content of her political positions—problematic political ideologies were often circulated among intimates among both local Bosniaks and Croats—but her unwillingness to adjust her behaviour in the presence of ethnic others. In contrast to more calculating town residents, who navigated the complex political landscape with tremendous caution (see Kurtović 2011), often keeping their own views obscure, Zora was in a manner of speaking, wearing her heart on her sleeve. Yet despite of all of this, she did not lack in friends and allies—some chose to ignore her nationalistic banter, others actively tried to change her points of view.

But outside of these enduring networks, Zora’s political standing in the community was uncertain. Once, during a conversation about voter intimidation and the buying of votes, she told me jokingly: “I wish someone would knock at my door with a gift basket or 50km (about \$30). I’d give them my vote in a heartbeat. But they never come.” Her joking aside, the absence of attempts to bring Zora into some kind of a client-patron relationship also testified to the fact her own political position in this community remained profoundly marginal. Even though she was one of the few remaining Serbs in the municipality, and potentially a valuable token asset, no political party even bothered to buy her vote.

This marginality had devastating consequences. In the spring of 2013, Zora fell ill. She suspected it was her gallbladder but could not know for sure; her prolonged unemployment had left her without any kind of health insurance that would cover a visit to the hospital. As her condition worsened, her daughter’s boss allegedly helped the family negotiate Zora’s way into the local hospital where she was to be operated (and where patients are rarely accepted without some kind of an additional monetary contribution). The surgery went fine, but within a few days, her condition deteriorated due to the secondary infection and eventual sepsis that the local doctors somehow failed to identify. Within days, this fifty-year-old woman who beamed with strength and resolve, died of a preventable and treatable infection, in the bed of what was once the best public hospital in north central Bosnia.

I do not mean to suggest that a more salient political affiliation would have prevented Zora’s untimely and bitterly tragic end. But I will propose that her chronic unemployment, combined with a lack of access to proper medical care, lead to her failed medical intervention, which eventually took her life. A casualty of the economic “transition” that followed the war, which left her generation of workers unemployed and unemployable, Zora somehow managed to cope with her myriad forms of dispossession until a health emergency put a final stop on all of her future prospects. Her death revealed not only the vulnerable nature of the human body and life itself, but also the precarious character of everyday existence for those who did not find elusive economic security in the postwar period (see Jašarević 2013).

It also placed in a different context the seeming pragmatism of younger residents of Jajce, such as Mirna, who sought an exit out of their never-ending insecurity. A municipal job, as uninteresting as it

may be, provided an ostensible guarantee of a regular, dependable salary and benefits that could make the risks of the new market easier to bear. For whatever reason, seats of political authority appeared more likely to weather crises than any business or NGO (despite the fact public sector salaries are now also late thanks to declining state funds). Public servants therefore seemed best able to stay afloat—at least until ferrosilicium production resumes or tourism industry again rises from ashes. To that end, perceptive young Bosnians such as Mirna, could not remain wedded to ideals of personal integrity or ideological consistency that ostensibly matter among their parents' generation (which is frequently outraged when it learns someone would join a political party just to get a job). Nor could they afford to let others know what they “really think” in the manner in which Zora so frequently did. The brutally marketized postwar economy has transformed previously inconceivable moves into ostensibly viable strategies. However, these forms of apparently instrumental rationality represent much more than evidence of rational choice, as they often come at devastating personal costs (e.g. loss of face, reputation and friends) that make doubtful their practical use; what's more, they most often fail to bring about the desired outcomes. In that sense, my critique here focuses not on the *fact* of political affiliation having become an economic currency, but on the widespread perception that political affiliation is necessary in order to secure a non-conditional future.

Remapping the political in the times of uncertainty

This chapter has provided a critique of both instrumental rationality and the trope of “sold-out souls” (*prodane duše*), which is so often mobilized in order to both portray and condemn those who enter political parties in order to secure viable future prospects for themselves and their families. In my experience, these types of opportunism never bloom overnight, but are instead a product of complex, prolonged and fraught negotiations. It is telling that Mirna chose emigration only when she realized that her last-resort plan would not work out, even though she could have left for Norway many years ago. Exile began to look like salvation only when a future in her hometown began to appear completely foreclosed. Mirna is not alone in this—young professionals continue to leave Bosnia nearly two decades after the end of the war because they either cannot or do not want to become embedded in these new political configurations. As the field within which one can negotiate alternative means of earning a living shrinks even further—consider for example the effects of the departure of international intervention machine which has provided thousands of jobs for local Bosnians—so do ways of imagining a livable future. Those that have to stay behind seem better poised to join the powers that be, which they seem unable to reform or conquer.

In place of denouncing these allegedly corrupted subjects of the war's aftermath, I have tried in this chapter to sketch out the structural conditions that define possible ways of being in contemporary Bosnia. Although I too think that this post-Dayton regime is sinister and destructive, I do not find its characteristics particularly unique. Different types of patronage and clientelism not only exist across the world, but often play a vital role in maintaining social bonds (e.g. Bailey 1971; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Ayuero 2001; Gambetta 1996). There is nothing inherently immoral in using one's associates and friends to find employment—to echo the words of my perceptive friend Aida: “In the US, they call it networking” (see Koutkova, this volume). What's more, transactions and exchanges are at the heart of every relationship, and every individual is a cluster of such relations. For this reason it is a mistake to see political clientelism in postwar Bosnia merely as a form of corruption—instead, we should see it as a way of thinking about power as historically contingent and as responding to the exigencies of the present. If the goal of modern governmentality is to get people *to do as they ought*, then contemporary forms of clientelism in Bosnia need to be seen precisely as a highly adaptable and organized ways of ensuring proper conduct (c.f. Haller and Shore 2005).

Recognizing clientelism as a constitutive aspect of modern political life in Bosnia also means reassessing the idea that the key cause behind the ongoing political paralysis is lack of popular political participation. As my ethnographic data on party affiliation from Jajce shows, citizens of Bosnia are

indeed participating politically, but not in the ways envisioned or preferred by international or local democracy promoters. Attention to the role that clientelism plays in local communities should also be given on behalf of those who believe that the solution for Bosnia's democratic deficits and widespread corruption lies in further decentralization (e.g. Bassuener and Weber 2014). Municipal governments and local communities tend to be the biggest strongholds of dominant political currents. Barring dramatic economic changes, these sites cannot be the axis or origin of post-Dayton reform, because the people who inhabit them are too boxed in to challenge the status quo.

Still, that political parties must rely so much on near-compulsory party membership to incorporate political threats, also suggests that Dayton regime, despite appearing immutable and totalizing, is actually very frail. If political affiliation owes so much to coercion and economic pragmatism, increased shortage of economic resources at the disposal of political parties may lead to radical shifts in citizens' behavior. As the scarcity of jobs, opportunities and budgetary resources continues to grow— despite the attempt of political elites to create a temporary fix through foreign loans—such loyalty will become far more difficult to secure. Hence, instead of stability, the post-Dayton years that follow may actually see far more rebellion against the soul-crushing logic of this ethnically defined illiberal democracy, and its merciless forms of dispossession.