Bosnian Fluxes

Belonging, Caring, and Reckoning in a Post-Cold War Semiperiphery

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Towards an anthropology of fluxes in the post-Cold War world: An introduction

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An introduction

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Introduction

Shortly before the end of 2019, Sarajevo-based journalist Senad Hadžifejzović, who launched his career more than three decades ago when he announced the start of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in a live broadcast, invited Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time, to his TV news programme. Seated in the studio, above the mixture of mist and smog in the streets below, the two men discussed from a bird's-eye view the many ills and predicaments that were suffocating the country. The list was long. It ranged from the 1992–1995 war and its aftermath to the dysfunctionality of the ethnocratic state, the widespread crime, and the impact of the unfolding 'migration-turned-humanitarian crisis' that intersected with another crisis – a growing exodus of BiH citizens abroad. At the time of the interview, the High Representative had been in office for more than a decade. But he claimed that during his tenure, he had become a mere observer. Thus, he shied away from taking any responsibility for the state in which the country found itself. All its ills, he concluded, signalled 'the end of hope' in and for the country.[1] Further elaborating his point, Inzko said that 'there was much more hope' after the war, and added, 'At that time, there was always some good news. (…) I remember that the most important news on 14 February 1996, was that UNHCR had opened a bus service from the airport to the city centre. What great news!' To this the journalist sarcastically replied, 'And now the main message, the main negative message, is that there is a bus route from Sarajevo to Vienna, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Munich', referring to the flight of BiH citizens abroad.

This conversation encapsulates two interrelated sets of concerns that form the underlying theme of this volume. First, there is the question of the sovereignty and agency of the polities that emerged out of the aftermath of the Cold War and became both the target of and a laboratory for international interventions, shock therapies, and governmentality (Beckett 2020; Coburn 2016; Donais 2005; Hetherington 2011; Pandolfi 2008). Such interventions are never equal encounters. Their effects are deep and long-lasting and often leave the countries and their citizens stuck in a state of structural and existential suspension indeterminately (Dewachi 2017; Dunn 2018; Gilbert 2020; Jansen 2015; Knight 2021). The High Representative's inability to recognise that many of the ills he was so quick and comfortable

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to list are deeply entangled in wider processes of post-Cold War transformation and dislocation, rather than simply being caused by endogenous conditions of ineptitude, is symptomatic of these encounters that reinforce enduring hierarchies, scornful attitudes, and betrayals. These encounters thus engendered as much anticipation and hope as they did despair, precarity, and dispossession, especially under the conditions of neoliberal globalisation worldwide that accelerated in the post-Cold War years (Han 2018; Petryna and Follis 2015). Second, we are concerned with what makes life possible in such circumstances, when the end of hope turns into a dusking horizon of expectations (Koselleck 2004). As David Graeber writes, hopelessness isn't natural, 'it needs to be produced' (2011, 31). And the same can be said of the conditions in which hope runs out – this does not occur naturally; it, too, must be produced. The next question then is how, by whom, and under what conditions does the end of hope become a serious possibility, and how is this resisted, refused, and altered. What situations and experiences *do not* forestall the ability to imagine possible alternative futures (Bryant and Knight 2019)?

Taking these two sets of concerns as a point of departure, this volume examines how ordinary lives unfold in situations of protracted upheaval and dislocation and with a constricted horizon of expectations at a particular historical juncture, that of the neoliberalising post-Cold War situation. But rather than approaching BiH as something exceptional, this volume takes its polity as both a perspective (Strathern 2004) and an arbitrary location 'which cuts through meaning' (Candea 2007, 180) in the 'hard-to-name period' (Nelson 2015, 40) that has been ushered in by the erosion of the Cold War world order and that we delineate here as the hyphenated notion of *'the post-Cold War'*.[2] Put differently, we consider BiH a spatio-temporal coordinate of larger developments after the Cold War and use it as a lens to examine these world-wide reconfigurations. By bringing together scholars with long-term research experience in BiH, along with scholars who have been documenting similar processes elsewhere, this volume seeks to go beyond the hegemonic spatio-hierarchical compartmentalisation of the world (Chari and Verdery 2009), beyond the strategic essentialisation of the 'Global East' (Müller 2020), and chart new coordinates for cross-regional comparisons, analogies, and juxtapositions.

In order to do that, in this volume we put forward *flux* as an analytical heuristic to study and explicate the protracted effects of upheaval, dislocation, and constricted horizon of expectations as they unfold in the post-Cold War semiperipheries. Flux, as we deploy it in this volume, centres our attention on the 'primacy of movement', which is here understood in a broad sense as an elementary condition that makes life possible (Ingold 2011; Patočka 1998). It attunes us to lifeworlds in a process of becoming that is punctuated with ruptures, immobilities, syncopes (Game 1997), and interferences (Serres 1982). Over the last three decades, BiH citizens have become entangled in the vicissitudes of a life in overwhelming flux. The political, economic, and social turmoil that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent 1992–1995 war were devastating, but so were the aftermaths of these events, now entangled in accelerated processes of neoliberal restructuring and economic and political dispossession, and increasingly also vis-à-vis the unfolding effects of climate breakdown (Henig 2024; Jašarević 2024). Their ramifications can still be

felt today, and they continue to shape BiH citizens' hopes and opportunities or lack thereof. Some of these lingering impacts were referred to by High Representative Inzko in the abovementioned interview. He could have also mentioned, for example, the pressure from international bodies such as the World Bank and their orthodoxies to deregulate and privatise publicly owned assets in the years after the war (Donais 2005; Lai 2020; Pugh 2002), which had disastrous consequences for the country's infrastructure, social welfare, as well as for individual well-being (Jansen 2006; Jašarević 2017; Klepal 2018; Kurtović 2015), but he said nothing about this. This pressure led to the fragmentation and privatisation of access to health care, education, jobs, and transport, and to the plundering and poisoning of BiH's water sources, rich forests, and the environment in general. This devastation has unfolded against the backdrop of considerable demographic decline, making BiH one of the fastest shrinking countries in Europe (Jansen, this volume; Kurtović 2020; World Bank 2019). Since the time of the war up until the recent COVID-19 pandemic there has indeed been among BiH citizens a widely shared sense of dispossession, marginalisation, and 'existential stuckedness' (Hage 2009), along with desperate 'yearnings for normal lives' (Jansen 2015). While existentially stuck in the 'meantime', as Stef Jansen (2015) puts it, people's lives have nevertheless been in a constant socio-material flux of what is vernacularly characterised as an ongoing mess (*belaj*), chaos (*haos*), tragedy (*katastrofa*), upheaval (*kijamet*), crisis (*kriza*), or simply a shitty situation (*sranje*).

Returning to the exchange between the local journalist and the High Representative cited above, we claim that shifting hopes, people on the move, and even the number of bus routes are not inherent to one particular place. There is rather something fundamentally indicative of an accelerated deregulation, widening inequalities, and the destruction of any esprit de corps between the ruling classes and the rest in the aftermaths of the Cold War (e. g. Eriksen 2016; Graeber 2013; Latour 2018; Piketty 2014). But, as this volume documents, this is an era that is simultaneously marked by the urge to pursue novel forms of 'worlding' and social reproduction, which is to say, novel ways of making the world inhabitable in its 'everydayness' (Zhan 2009, 201; Stewart 2007) amidst these upheavals. We would even suggest here that particular forms of worlding, such as *belonging* (i.e. where someone or something belongs, with whom someone belongs, and what belongs to whom), *caring* (concerns and bonds with practical, affective, and politico-ethical dimensions), and *reckoning* (a preoccupation with the production, distribution, and consumption of numbers), are key to understanding the fluctuating nature of post-Cold War effects world-wide (for such a comparison see Bertelsen, this volume; Bryant, this volume). Before we elaborate on this argument, we need to explain BiH's features as a spatio-temporal coordinate in our story of the *post-Cold War fluxes*.

Metaphors and frames

Let us return to the conversation between Senad Hadžifejzović and Valentin Inzko. We are in particular interested in the High Representative's suggestion that there is an inherent inevitability of places like BiH being hopelessly stuck and

dysfunctional because of *where* they are, which also to some extent determines *who* they are and *what* they are like. This way of seeing and framing BiH is typical of much of the enduring discourse on 'imagining the Balkans' (Green 2005; Perić, this volume). But this geopolitical imaginary is also indicative of a post-Cold War proliferation of discourses on marginal and semiperipheral regions incapable of sovereign agency (Bryant and Reeves 2021). In other words, this imaginary tends to create and assert the geographies of global danger zones (Andersson 2019), or of an inherent ineptitude, constantly lagging behind some*where* and some*thing*. It is 'historical agents', Arjun Appadurai writes, along with 'institutions, actors, and powers that make the geography' (2013, 66), rather than the other way round. Appadurai's argument offers a helpful method for 'escaping the conundrum of the local and the global' (2013, 67) and abandoning the geographical determinism asserted by the High Representative.[3] Building on Appadurai's incisive point that *histories in flux* are what produce geographies and localities, we also need to add that historical events are what produce the pervasive metaphors and frames of a geography.

Indeed, we could return to the characterisation of BiH as 'a laboratory for intervention and experimentation' (Chandler 2000; Donais 2005; Pandolfi 2008). The 'BiH as a laboratory' metaphor has become widely used in policy-making and academic circles, and by BiH citizens themselves, since the time of the 1992–1995 war.[4] And metaphors matter. Metaphors *in*form the thoughts and actions of institutions as well as people, and they influence the way actors apprehend and get around in the world. Through metaphors institutions and people relate to one another and perceive their everyday reality (Douglas 1986; Herzfeld 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). But metaphors can cast as much light as shadow on matters and can stabilise and fix a world that is in flux and in a perpetual process of becoming. Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, which officially ended the war, many international political, humanitarian, and economic 'top-down' interventions and policies have been fuelled by the hope of overcoming the effects of the violent ethnic homogenisation of the country, which were cemented by the Dayton Agreement itself.[5] Rebuilding the 'bridges' between divided communities or restoring the Bosnian pre-war 'ethnic mosaic', often likened to a 'Bosnian *ćilim*' (handwoven rug), became powerful metaphors, which guided interventions and policies without consideration of the context on the ground. 'Bottom-up' studies, on the other hand, have challenged such metaphors and their effects (Gilbert 2020). These studies have shown that the impact of the war on the 'new Bosnian mosaic' has been much more complex and in flux, and that such metaphors mirror the ideologies of the international actors rather than taking into account the everyday experiences and problems of citizens in BiH (Bougarel et al. 2007). Ethnographically grounded studies have attempted to elucidate the discursive repertoires and other figures of speech, in particular chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981), that resonate with the ongoing dislocations, everyday struggles, and hopes and aspirations of people in this hard-to-name period. Chronotopes such as 'swamp', 'labyrinth', and 'waiting room' (Jansen, Brković, Čelebičić 2016) or the portrayal of 'empty bellies' (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017) encompass a widely shared embodied feeling of entrapment,

stuckedness, and precarity among BiH citizens and their temporal disorientation towards the present and the future.

However, these powerful and ethnographically grounded metaphors not only *react* to but also *enact* how BiH as a spatio-temporal coordinate is *framed* and thus produced in these debates. Drawing on Judith Butler (2009), we recognise 'frames' not only as the ultimate source of understanding and explanations. Beyond their epistemological power, which inherently entails violence and silences, frames simultaneously have ontological effects. They not only help to determine what is worth seeing, they also selectively carve out what is real and pronounce some concrete realities as more essential than others. Michelle Obeid, similarly to Bruno Latour (2005), poignantly characterises these effects as *freeze-framing* that 'risks collapsing the messiness and undulations of social life into still characterisations' (2016, 198). In the case of BiH, we identify three broader epistemological-cum-ontological frames that pervade much of the knowledge production in past three decades in one way or another: postconflict, postsocialist, and postcolonial. Let us address each of them in turn.

Postconflict

As the Sarajevan philosopher Ugo Vlaisavljević (2007) argued, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the 'biggest cultural event' for local nationalists. It made their ethnonational ideologies and projects tangible, inescapable, and also legal. While Vlaisavljević points out that the war had nothing to do with the ancient hatred among 'Balkan tribes' – an argument also widely perpetuated by foreign scholars and journalists – but stemmed rather from the processes of modernisation and the constitution of 'small nations', he, like many others, reads the circumstances in BiH almost exclusively through the lens of ethnonationalism.[6] In this view, the postwar period is a continuation of an ethnonational politics that is rooted in and draws its legitimacy from an armed conflict that was conceptualised by some as a civil war (between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs in BiH) and by others as an aggression (of the Croatian and Serbian ethnic states against the multiethnic BiH). This frame takes 'ethnonational identity', in Immanuel Kant's words, as an 'analytic a priori', whereby it then becomes an axiomatic interpretative prism through which to view anything in BiH, including its past, present, and future. Vlaisavljević's view seems to be symptomatic of this frame, which Jansen et al. (2016) label an 'ethnonational identitarian matrix'. Besides political and institutional issues (e.g. Bieber 2006; Gordy 2015), the primary analytical focus of this frame has been directed at the study of the identity politics of 'Bosniaks', 'Croats', and 'Serbs' and at the study of new categorical identities generated by the war, such as displaced persons, returnees, victims of gendered violence, or survivors of atrocities (e.g. Allen 1996; Halilovich 2013; O'Reilly 2018; Toal and Dahlman 2011). Interestingly, this frame has not only reduced postwar BiH realities to their ethnic dimensions. It has also (largely unintentionally) reproduced and substantiated the ethnic dimension of BiH in the same way international actors did with their agendas about rebuilding bridges, restoring the pre-war ethnic mosaic, and teaching and preaching liberal

values of tolerance (Helms 2013; Henig 2021; Hromadžić 2015; Lippman 2019; on proliferation of these liberal discourses in the post-Cold War era, see Dzenovska 2018).

Postsocialist

As the prevailing focus on ethnonational identification is unable to engage with the experiences and manifold day-to-day struggles of BiH citizens, a growing number of social scientists have started to question the postconflict frame *tout court*. These studies, most of them grounded in ethnography, have brought to light the issue of (post)socialist continuities and transformations and how they parallel the situation in other postsocialist countries but have been largely overshadowed by the results of ethnic conflict (Bougarel et al. 2007; Gilbert 2006; Gilbert et al. 2008). Using postsocialism as the principal frame, these studies demonstrated the pervasive continuity of some socialist values, practices, and affective histories in the imagined 'transition' to democracy and a market economy after the collapse of Yugoslav state socialism (Petrović 2016). The studies also highlighted the impact the democratising and neoliberal reforms and shock therapies exported from the capitalist 'West' had on the region, and how they altered the local environment, economic activities, class structure, and demographic characteristics of the population and impacted people's livelihoods on a scale and with an intensity comparable to the war itself (e.g. Henig 2020; Jansen 2006; Kurtović 2015). Instead of focusing on the specific populations and categorical identities generated by the war, this frame typically exposes various burning socio-economic issues and injustices affecting 'ordinary people' and 'citizenry', such as the inhabitants of a housing complex or young people (Hromadžić 2015; Jansen 2015), and most recently also 'civic activists' unaligned with any ethnonationalist identitarianism (Gilbert 2018; Kurtović 2020; Milan 2020). The war and its (ethnonationalist) aftermaths, if raised as issues at all, are approached within this frame as the products of various political mobilisations and instrumentalisations rooted in postsocialist circumstances.

Postcolonial

In recent years, together with the rise of public discontent and protests such as 'Babylution', 'Bosnian Spring', and 'Justice for David' (Kurtović 2018; Majstorovic 2023; Milan 2020), some scholars have foregrounded the impact of neoliberalism on BiH and on the whole 'Yugosphere' (e.g. Arsenijević 2014; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Kurtović 2015, 2020; Mujanović 2018). While the impact of neoliberal policies was also discussed in the past,[7] the new generation of scholars bases their own framing on the limits of the postsocialist frame – which is to some extent considered a tool of Western academic colonialism (Buchowski 2006). For them, the causes of poverty, unemployment, corruption, nepotism, and other post-Yugoslav ills are all tied up with the logics and practices of global neoliberal capitalism and the expansion of neocolonial powers in the post-Cold War juncture, rather than having been generated by local postsocialist or postconflict conditions. While

the 'postsocialist frame' was mostly informed by anthropological studies of post-socialism, this new frame draws on critical postcolonial theories. Even though the application of the postcolonial frame has been met with some criticism (e.g. Bjelić and Savić 2002; Mishkova 2019; Todorova 2018), it is a frame that enables scholars to also attend to issues such as race (Baker 2018; Rexhepi 2023), 'Europeanisation' (Kurnik and Razsa 2020; Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016), imperial legacies and the neo-imperial politics of memory (Rexhepi 2018, 2019), and the global socialism championed by the Non-Aligned Movement (Spaskovska 2018; Stubbs 2020).

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In sum, all three frames undoubtedly clarify important aspects of BiH's developments and align its polity with other (semi)peripheries in the post-Cold War world. However, we argue that there is a risk of these frames being too self-contained, and, in their ontological effect, of them becoming mutually exclusive. The war and related ethnonational identitarianism are often used as a proxy for explaining almost everything that is happening in 'postconflict BiH' and they overshadow other processes at work. To overcome the ethnonational matrix, the postsocialist frame has foregrounded various socialist continuities and highlighted the effects of postsocialist neoliberal transformations. But the question of to what extent post-socialist issues were driven to the surface by ethnic homogenisation fuelled by the war, especially in seemingly 'multiethnic' urban environments, remains largely ignored. And while everyday life in BiH today is confronted with imperial legacies and neocolonial governances that measure and (de)value the conduct of persons and the workings of local institutions (Knaus and Martin 2003), their reading through the postcolonial frame risks to be oversimplified because of its unidirectional explanation.

Rather than using these frames as the proxies for interrogating what has been happening in BiH during the past three decades, this edited volume seeks to understand BiH as a spatio-temporal coordinate that both empirically and conceptually challenges these frames. As Butler suggests, 'to call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable' (2009, 9). For this reason, the contributors to this volume engage with the three frames not as something that provides the ultimate explanation of the period after the Cold War as it has unfolded in BiH during the past thirty years. These frames are rather approached as problematic spots, whose leakages, contaminations, cracks, and outsides need to be scrutinised through empirical and analytical work. Thus, it is the multiple meanings and usages of *flux* that this edited volume employs as a productive analytical heuristic for the study of the socio-material upheavals and dislocations – temporal and spatial, individual and collective – that emerged from the 'transits, transitions, and transformations' (Svašek 2012) after the Cold War and that ushered in the possibility of formulating novel forms of belonging, caring, and reckoning.

The post-Cold War multiple

If we recall the High Representative's words about new hopes and the building of new bus routes by international governing bodies, we might interpret them as the markers of BiH's *real entrance* into the post-Cold War era, which was delayed by the violence. Nevertheless, 'this millennial mood of expectation, of an eternal path to prosperity primed by the end of the Cold War' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2018, 289), did not last for long, as the High Representative Inzko complained during the television interview. While the end of the Cold War, as a 'chronological point' (as suggests Heonik Kwon in Foreword), may have provided (Western) policymakers with 'definitive proof that the capitalist economic system had won' (Ghodsee and Orenstein 2021, 196), for a few generations of BiH citizens there was no reason to look towards a better future. They had already the better future, in the nonaligned Yugoslavia of the past (see Jansen 2009; Stubbs 2023).[8] The new mantras of creating a free market, (neo)liberalisation, democratisation, and Europeanisation turned into bitter reminders of the spatio-temporal 'peripheralisation' (Kojanić 2020) of their lives. '*Šuti, dobro je, samo da ne puca*' (Shut up, it's enough that there's no shooting) is a comment that has circulated persistently among BiH citizens for three decades and it encapsulates the troubling nature of the (geo)political-economic configurations that emerged in BiH after the Cold War.

In this book we suggest that BiH as a particular spatio-temporal coordinate serves as more than just an instructive case that challenges the view of the Cold War and its aftermaths as 'a self-evident, given global reality' (Kwon 2010, 7) of neat spatial divides into Three world ideologies (Chari and Verdery 2009, 18). We ground such claim, for instance, on Bockman's (2011) analysis of Yugoslav 'market socialism' that not only disseminated during the Cold War to various parts of the world through the Non-Aligned Movement but also fostered interactions 'between and beyond the dichotomy of Soviet state socialism and American market capitalism' (Bockman 2011, 60). BiH also allows us to explore the ambiguous processes, experiences, and histories that constitute the post-Cold War situation (Chari and Verdery 2009). Although transition, marketisation, and liberalisation became commonplace slogans among (self-managed) workers and other citizens during Yugoslav times, connecting them *with*, yet emancipating them *from*, both opposing blocks, these concepts were later 'successfully exploited and distorted' (Bockman 2011, 212) by the international New Right in the expansion of neoliberalism. Consequently, the same slogans were reintroduced to BiH citizens after the Cold War, yet they now signify competitive markets, a diminished yet authoritarian state, private yet hierarchical ownership, and capitalism without adjectives, and all of this under the international supervision of the High Representative office. The '"galaxy" of alternatives' (Bockman 2011, 215) of the previous era has become unreachable, leaving BiH citizens to navigate new, peripheralised ways of worlding, as exemplified by Bianchi in this volume, who discusses how young adults acquire 'projectuality', a neoliberal habitus that simultaneously subjugates and liberates them concerning the futures imagined by Republika Srpska and international donors. Similarly, Gilbert in this volume illustrates how Tuzla's impoverished

workers in the Bosnian city of Tuzla experiment to regain their political and social significance, this time through their suffering bodies.

Instead of purifying such heterogenous realities on the ground through postconflict, postsocialist, or postcolonial frames, we consider in this volume the post-Cold War as an analytical perspective attentive to actual socio-material practices and circumstances in which life is made possible, aiding in understanding how 'Cold War representations have shaped and continue to shape theory and politics' and in reconceiving a common 'world with differentiated histories' (Chari and Verdery 2009, 18–19). This post-Cold War world with differentiated histories, considered 'rather than as a given condition and a thing of the past, as an arena of contemporary history in which ordinary actions and actions taken by ordinary historical actors can engage creatively' (Kwon, this volume) is now subjected to 'accelerated, but uneven change where different subsystems are chronically out of sync with each other' (Eriksen 2016, 484). The question that arises from theorising the post-Cold War as understood by scholars like Chari and Verdery is how to think multiplicity within this post-Cold War world. In this volume we develop the notion of flux as one possible way to do that.

Fluxes: (Not) going with the flow

Not surprisingly, the erosion of the bipolar world order gave rise in the 1990s to the study of globalisation, transnationalism, and diaspora (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1992). The concept of 'flow' gained prominence in social theory for analysing this new 'global situation' (Tsing 2000). In this period, the concept of flow offered a productive way of highlighting how the circulation of capital, commodities, technologies, images, and people has given rise to 'the combined experience of insecurity (of position, entitlements and livelihood), of uncertainty (as to their continuation and future stability) and of unsafety (of one's body, one's self and their extensions: possessions, neighbourhood, community)' (Bauman 2000, 161), all of which characterise the impacts of the post-Cold War era's stressful fluidity. However, as Rockefeller (2011) has argued, little attention was given to scrutinising the complicated genealogy of the widely used concept of flow. According to Rockefeller, while this concept has been used by eminent scholars of globalisation, such as Arjun Appadurai, Ulf Hannerz, and others, to foreground the processual character and complexities of cultural formations and to question some earlier conceptual divisions, it is rooted in a 'radical space/time dualism' (2011, 564). Beyond its ontological fallacy, using the flow concept to facilitate a 'macro' perspective serves, in Rockefeller's view, to elide the struggles and agency of real people in small-scale communities and places. As a result, flow unwittingly naturalises the mechanisms, workings, and self-presentations of neoliberal capitalism (see also Graeber 2002; Ho 2005). In favouring large agents over local actors, the concept reinforces a managerial, top-down perspective (see also Sutherland 2013).

In this volume we take seriously both the inspiration from anthropological work on global flows and the critiques of such work (Ong and Collier 2005; Tsing 2005). That is why we prefer to speak here about *flux* (instead of flow) as a distinct

analytical heuristic and to ground it in the work of Michel Serres (1982, 1995a, 1995b). Flux is a capacious notion that Serres develops in his theorising of *the multiple* and *multiplicity* as opposed to the dominant tradition of Western epistemology focused on fixed units, and solidity of categories and concepts. As Annemarie Mol points out, 'against an excess of solidity, Serres proposed alternative models to think with: muddy places where water and land mix, clouds first forming and then dissipating into rain, curving paths that twist and turn, fires that consume what they encounter' (2021, 20). For Serres (1995a), neither is the multiple locally individuated, nor it is globally summed up. Rather, the multiple points to 'the ordinary lot of situations, including that of the ordinary scholar, regular knowledge, everyday work, in short, our common object' (Serres 1995a, 4). And for Serres, our common object of the multiple is what he terms *background noise* (see also Serres 1982). Put differently, behind every seemingly ordered systems of knowledge, or solid categories and concepts, there is always some *dis*order, porosity of categorical boundaries, missing and unaccounted parts of seeming wholes and unities. The multiple, then, as '[b]ackground noise is the ground of our perception, absolutely uninterrupted, it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic' (Serres 1995a, 7). And background noise is for Serres *the flux* that 'increases, decreases, globally, locally it is multiple, various, variegated' (Serres 1995a, 65).

With his passion for reflecting on chaos, noise, mixtures, or blending, Serres emphasised that spatio-temporal realities reassemble the river – for some it could be the Seine, for others the Bosna – because on closer inspection the river is not really a unidirectional stream. It is a nonlinear fluctuation formed of countercurrents, folds, vortexes, evaporation, and filtration (Serres and Latour 1995, 58; see also Watkin 2020, 131–34). In other words, by using the concept of flux we do not seek to reproduce such ready-made dichotomies as global and local, core and periphery, time and space, agency and inaction, durability and mutability, or ethnic and civic. Instead, we are interested in their 'multiplicity of fluctuations' (Serres 1995a, 65), that is, how they are formulated and enacted in particular events, processes, things, and experiences, and we trace their 'patterns of presences and absences' (Law and Singleton 2005). In our view, such an approach resonates closely with the predicaments in the everyday lives of BiH citizens and allows us to think the multiplicity within the common post-Cold War world.

Nor does thinking in terms of flux for us mean naturalising neoliberal capitalism or internalising the top-down perspective that sees only smooth global flows (of capital) and ignores the mundane, marginal, small-scale struggles going on in particular places. On the contrary, flux sensitises us to the textures and possibilities of life on the plane of the ordinary (Das 2007), but it does not stop there. Furthermore, as some STS scholars have noted, thinking in terms of fluid and fluidity, doesn't necessarily mean that 'everything goes' with the flow (e.g. De Laet and Mol 2000; Mol 2002; Mol and Law 1994). Rather, this body of work has demonstrated that some realities might be ready to transform and vary without abrupt changes, while others stubbornly refuse to collapse even though they have no clear structures or boundaries. Furthermore, it has shown that the movements that various realities are born out of particular settings, like a case of atherosclerosis that is enacted in

different wings of a single hospital in multiple versions that need to be coordinated (Mol 2002). Thus, with the notion of flux we want to foreground both the situatedness and embeddedness of movements in a concrete scene.

In a more literal sense this volume explores how entanglements of people, things, capitals, and knowledges intersect in multiple ways and configurations in BiH, and in turn how they spread, escape, percolate, and branch out into other coordinates, and what forms of life make such entanglements possible. Here, we follow John Law's observation that flux can be described as 'the sense that whatever is out there is not a structure with a discoverable shape, but is excessively filled with and made in heteromorphic currents, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, storms, and with moments of lull and calm' (2004, 160). Turning this sense into an analytical sensitivity, we, thus, do not consider realities such as belonging, caring, and reckoning in BiH to be predetermined objects with a fixed surface and definitively stabilised content that is 'postconflict', 'postsocialist', or 'postcolonial'. We approach the upheavals and dislocations that BiH citizens face and partake in as multiplying fluxes, in which their constitutive *materials* undergo generation and transformation, and which are not separate but are dependent on each other and are the result of an interplay between various durabilities and discontinuities, absences and presences.

Instances of flux: Belonging, caring, and reckoning in a post-Cold War semiperiphery

While metaphors like swamp, labyrinth, waiting room, or empty bellies refer to BiH citizens' sense of emptiness and their experience of being trapped and of being rendered immobile in time and place, we suggest that these senses and experiences result from the excessive movements people register and imagine around and inside their bodies and lives (see also Merriman 2019); these result from the feeling that 'everything is running away' from them (Serres 1995a, 64). Rather than reproducing 'zones of disconnection' (Comaroff 2020) or the stasis of 'Eastness' (Müller 2019, 2020), this volume finds various registers of (not) 'moving well enough' (Hage 2009; Jansen 2014, 2015), and both their existential and their sociomaterial causes, courses, and effects. For example, encounters with the BiH state, or, rather, with the entities' bureaucracy can easily produce a sense of labyrinthine disorientation and stuckedness. Yet such feelings map onto the dizzying attempts to collect the necessary documents and their circulation in and through institutions. The enormous amount of time BiH citizens spend and the great number of institutions they have to visit when they *ganjaju papire/papirologiju* (are chasing documents) in order to travel, retire, collect war disability payments, or apply for a schoolbook subsidy (see Jansen 2015), is paralleled by the movements that occur in family budgets or even in their own stomachs. Similarly, not only do the waiting rooms in social protection and healthcare facilities force people to wait passively, they may also be forcing them to mobilise *veze* and *štele*, relations and connections, in order to navigate their way through the social protection and healthcare systems (Brković 2017; Hromadžić, this volume) or even to travel or take detours

leading to unofficial and subaltern healthcare providers in the country or abroad (Jašarević 2017). All these places of entrapment and in-the-meantimeness resulting from multiplying upheavals are what give rise to the 'zone of entanglement' (Cochrane 2019) through which people, things, humans and non-humans, ideas, and concepts drift. They also sensitise BiH citizens to the various *tokovi* (flows) (e.g. Sampson 2002) of workers, refugees, humanitarian donations, aid packages, internationals' projects, human remains, and viruses and the hierarchies and asymmetries between them. Simultaneously, while not much wealth trickles down in BiH, as elsewhere, and tends instead to sediment upstream, one can often hear from BiH citizens that even in the dire circumstances of their everyday lives, hidden but 'real' pasts, truths, solidarities, and information can *isplivati* (rise to the surface) or *procuriti* (leak out). They 'percolate' (Serres and Latour 1995, 58–9, 105) – their bits and pieces may find their way to the surface through surprising channels, such as the iron ores Sabrina Perić writes about in her chapter in this volume.

Soaked with heavy rainfall, the ground itself could even be on the move, endangering life on the roads, in the villages, or in parts of towns, which became especially apparent during the spring of 2014 and the autumn of 2024. Floods and *klizište* (landslides) as reminders of global climate change and rampant commercial deforestation and mining could also bring to the surface past 'tectonic shifts' when they result in the exposure of unexploded ordnance or change the locations of human remains (Jugo and Wagner, this volume; Henig 2024). The mindful bodies of BiH citizens might also be soaked – with the recurrent fears and accumulated debts that need to be 'poured out' (Jašarević 2017). In other words, we see flux as a heuristic device that allows us to explore *semiperipheries* – the seemingly 'muddy places' of the post-Cold War era along with the 'transitive relations' (Mol 2021, 19) that exist in these areas between people, things, environments, technologies, institutions, practices, and politics. As this volume documents, there is a myriad of motions and 'meshwork' (Ingold 2007, 2011) occurring in and around BiH's 'swamps', 'labyrinths', 'waiting rooms', and 'empty bellies'. There are influxes, affluxes, outfluxes.

Here, we follow scholars who approach the post-Yugoslav sphere in general and BiH in particular as 'semiperiphery of Europe' (e.g. Blagojević 2009; Jansen et al. 2016). The spatio-temporal notion of semiperiphery in these debates refers to the geopolitical and political economic zones of entanglement between the EU and its constitutive non-European outside (Jansen et al. 2016). It encapsulates experiences of the polity in flux, that is, caught in the state of instability, conditionality, and in-betweenness as a result of restructured post-Cold War politico-economic relations between desired centres and stigmatised peripheries and that is kept in suspended promise of 'joining the club' in the future. What is the structure of feeling in those semiperipheral polities that have found themselves caught in the midst of reconfiguration of aspiration and peripheralisation as a result of the post-Cold War aftermaths? This is a question as relevant for BiH as for other post-Cold War semiperipheries as the commentaries by Rebecca Bryant, Clara Han, and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen illustrate in this volume. They show that its analytical purchase for studying the multiplicity of differentiated yet analogous spatio-temporal trajectories of

semiperipheries in flux within the common post-Cold War world is much wider. What's more, we can therefore think of these post-Cold War semiperipheries as 'fractals' (Green 2005), displaying a degree of self-similarity and inherent relationality across scales.

This analytical move then allows us to ask: What movements and entanglements of people, things, knowledges, and environments occur in BiH and how do they (re)shape and are they (re)shaped by the post-Cold War upheavals? In this volume we explore these questions through three instances of flux that we consider principal for empirically examining (im)mobile lives in the spatio-temporal coordinate of BiH and for developing a vocabulary that is sensitive to the connections and juxtapositions of socio-material upheavals and emergent world-making processes in the semiperipheries of the post-Cold War world more broadly. The first of these instances of flux is *belonging* which entails the processes by which individuals and collectives are embedded in factual or imagined grounds that might entangle together soil, land, graves, home, place, knowledge/technology, class, biology, religion, nation, state, 'Europe', etc., as heterogenous mixture. The second is *caring* that involves practices and affects related to matters of individual and collective concern such as justice, solidarity, or suffering. And finally *reckoning* that we understand as thinking, calculating, and judging (Chrisomalis 2020; Nelson 2015) through and with numbers, ranging from mundane enumerations (e.g. the household budget, betting, air pollution) to the products of the bureaucratic statistical imagination (e.g. censuses, migration, epidemics) and international bodies' accounts of economic growth, social expenditures, and the level of democracy.

Book outline

For decades BiH has been depicted as a space that produces more ethnonational identity than it can consume. Making sense of events in BiH through ethnonational identitarian politics has become constitutive especially for the postconflict frame that we discussed earlier. To avoid the pitfalls of such a frame, the first section of the book consists of studies on affinities, relatedness, and self-understandings, which emphasise the ontologically 'slippery' (Law and Lien 2013) nature of belonging in BiH and thus keep the issues of ethnonationalism and political economy open to empirical enquiry.

While focusing on the specific aspects of the Omarska concentration camp, Sabrina Perić problematises the essentialisation of violence and shows how the history of the 'Balkans as a transregional extractive space' percolates into ideas of belonging based on changing configurations of territory, people, and natural resources. Like Perić, Jelena Golubović approaches the fluctuations of the past as sources of belonging, but in her chapter she uses the example of 'yugonostalgia' that is often presented as a possible means of reconciliation. The chapter is based on her ethnographic fieldwork among Sarajevo Serbs and foregrounds the situated and 'less reconciliatory' versions of yugonostalgia that are used by local Serbs to reinforce narratives of economic and ethnic precarity as the grounds of their contested self-understandings. Finally, Michele Bianchi explores how the ordinary lives of 'young

adults' unfold at the intersection of the nation-state building processes carried out by the institutions of Republika Srpska and the democratisation and development initiatives supported by the international community. His fieldwork data also closely resonate with the volume's emphasis on the broader reconfigurations of times, places, and people. The chapter demonstrates how protracted and multiplying crises create the feeling that everything (futures, own lives, prosperity) is moving away but also have the effect of prompting young adults to pursue novel forms of relating.

Finally, in this section, Rebecca Bryant, who in her commentary reads and discusses the chapters by Perić, Golubović, and Bianchi through the lens of her extensive fieldwork in Cyprus, suggests that, due to the slippery and fluctuating post-Cold War grounds, belonging(s) are often performed as 'aporetic'. In other words, the 'perceived loss of communal agency and a desire to regain it' reveals the fluctuation and entanglement of nostalgic pasts and uncertain futures.

In the second part of the book, empirical attention shifts to the concerns and commitments relating to practical, affective, and politico-ethical issues in BiH and how these concerns and commitments have been brought to the surface and have emerged through the turbulences in the world. Elissa Helms examines developments on the 'Balkan route' in northwest BiH during the COVID-19 pandemic. She describes how the influx and stranding of migrants along that route produced a shift in local moral sentiments about vulnerability, deservingness, and race. While Helms's chapter highlights the unstable entanglements of care involving local governments, international organisations, foreign volunteers, and EU monies, Azra Hromadžić explores the everyday 'infrapolitics' of social workers (in the same region) that are utilised in the effort to provide care within the messy arena of social policy and welfare produced by the legacies of the socialist past, informality, and neoliberal responsibilisation. The chapter also shows that hostile circumstances do not prevent people from tinkering with existing and fostering new solidarities, mutual dependencies, autonomies, and goods. In the third chapter of this section Andrew Gilbert explores a mixture of humanitarianism and politics in an urban centre in northeast BiH, where unemployed workers cast themselves as suffering subjects. He points out that such 'experiments' with the demand for care restore the political relevance of workers. Gilbert argues that the 'novel and transitory social relations' that the workers mobilise are indicative of the shifting structures of feelings and ethics in the predicaments of post-Cold War life. All three chapters thus illustrate the importance of addressing care as a distinct topic of inquiry, one that has been overlooked in studies on BiH. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, they also show that practices of care are always shot through with asymmetrical power relations (see Martin et al. 2015).

While Bryant primarily draws on her ethnography, Clara Han, in her commentary on the second section, chooses a different strategy. Rather than reflecting on her extensive work in Chile (Han 2012), she provides a careful yet sharp reading of the chapters by Helms, Hromadžić, and Gilbert. For her, these chapters explore the fluidity and multiplicity of care in the post-Cold War dynamics, not only in terms of actual practices but also in relation to the shifting formulations of justice and politics as part of our analytical vocabulary.

The book's last section deals with the fluxes of numbers that 'indexes a desire for accountability' (Fryer and Dedrick 2023, 339; see also Verdery 1999) with and in the post-Cold War situation. Numbers and their regimes and practices have a profoundly transformative impact on what BiH citizens choose to do, what they try to be, and what they think of themselves during past decades. They are their means for various reckonings that foreground issues of responsibility, care, (in)efficiency, success or failure. While two decades ago Stef Jansen (2005) showed how people in the former Yugoslavia were consumed by 'national numbers', this time he opens the last section with a vivid analysis of the percolating 'demographic alarmism' that currently preoccupies both the public and common people in BiH. Jansen's engagement with numbers related to the depopulation of BiH, examined through 'the prism of care' (e.g., Who will care for the elderly when the younger generation has left the country?), demonstrates how numbers 'inhabit people and enable them to inhabit a world' (Nelson 2015) shaped by protracted upheavals, dislocations, and narrowed horizons of expectation.

Finally, Admir Jugo and Sarah Wagner carefully (and respectfully) follow the unstable and shifting entanglements of people, numbers, and technologies tied up with the cases of 'missing persons'. They conclude that despite all the innovations and achievements of forensic science that have made it possible to decipher the 'mathematics of death' (Nelson 2015), missing persons in BiH, their remains and numbers, are far from stable. These chapters thus portray calculation as 'qualculation', which means 'to include categories of action such as judgment with which it is usually contrasted' (Callon and Law 2005, 718). The production, distribution, and consumption of numbers are often interwoven with enactments of belonging and care, and thus the definitions of what is calculable and what is not generate numerous moral, political, economic, and environmental dilemmas. It is the number's affordance, its ability 'to travel, to make possible comparison, conversion, exchange, to be stored, to inform, and to make sameness and difference' (Day et al. 2014, 127), that makes it both the imprint and the trigger of multiplying upheavals.

In his commentary on the magic of numbers and what in/visibilities numbers and number composites engender, Bjørn Enge Bertelsen connects the chapters in this section with his own long-term ethnographic work in Mozambique and Southern Africa. Bertelsen puts the chapters of Jansen, and Jugo and Wagner into a conversation across the post-Cold War as well as Socialist and Communist Hemispheres. He shows how 'The flux in numbers is also tied to a broader issue: the emergence of the primacy of calculability of life', and more specifically what are the biopolitical effects of what he terms – after Achille Mbembe – 'cybernetification of human life'. This notion could not be more apt as a concluding remark. The development of cybernetics and cybernetic understanding of the world and life – 'the literally symbiotic art of steering or governing by loops' (Serres 1995b, 42) – is inseparable from the context of the Cold War. In turn, the emergence of the 'cybernetification of human life' should not be seen merely 'as a chronological point but as an ongoing process of what is yet to come' (Kwon, this volume). Achieving this, as Heonik Kwon reflects in his illuminating Foreword, requires a careful, historically informed ethnographic examination of post-Cold War multiplicities, whether in

BiH or elsewhere. One possible way to develop such a 'mature' understanding of the post-Cold War, as Kwon calls for, might begin with identifying and tracing the fluxes that connect across the post-Cold War world.

Notes

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bP3zODY3rI
2 While the use of the hyphen may seem like a common linguistic convention, its application in the notion of 'the post-Cold War' is intended here to underscore Michel Serres' emphasis on 'porous connection' (Bandak and Knight 2024, 4). Put differently, 'the hyphen allows alignment and conjunction of disparate parts, indicating a branching out of expertise into new collaborative domains (centrifugal) but also the drawing together of units of knowledge (centripetal) that do not obviously fit together' (Bandak and Knight 2024, 3). In this volume, the hyphen in 'the post-Cold War' is also a means of taking seriously Chari and Verdery's (2009) assertion regarding the endurance, partiality, and reworkings of the Cold War and its aftermaths.
3 Valentin Inzko's implicit geographic determinism is not unique but rather symptomatic to the ongoing imperialist hierarchisation of the post-Cold War world among the Western elites. For instance, during his first presidency, Donald Trump labelled numerous countries as 'shitholes' (Kendi 2019).
4 The recent iteration relates to the outbreak and management of *korona kriza* (the coronavirus crisis). For BiH citizens, the pandemic not only heightened feelings of being subjects in both local and global experiments – exacerbated by the lack of access to vaccines, the critical need for humanitarian assistance, and aid packages from the EU, China, the Bosnian diaspora, Serbia, and several Muslim-majority countries, as well as the persistent strain on healthcare and welfare systems (see Helms, this volume; Hromadžić, this volume). It also amplified widespread concerns about post-Cold War geopolitical disparities and marginalisation.
5 'Dayton' or 'post-Dayton' BiH has become a powerful metaphor itself, being both the model of successful/failed international intervention and the model for conflict resolution (see Gilbert and Mujanović 2015; Jansen et al. 2016).
6 As Appadurai writes elsewhere, 'This observation reminds us that large-scale violence is not simply the product of antagonistic identities but that violence itself is one of the ways in which the illusion of fixed and charged identities is produced, partly to allay the uncertainties about identity that global flows invariably produce' (2006, 7).
7 For example, Woodward (1995) looked at neoliberal economic reforms as one of the sources of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, and Donais (2005) and Lai (2020) showed how international humanitarian intervention and the ensuing reconstruction in BiH pushed these reforms.
8 We are particularly sensitive to these normative issues of the past in BiH because of the persistence of Cold War imaginaries dividing East and West, which continue to shape both academic and political debates in the Czech Republic (e.g., Barša et al. 2021; Cervinkova 2012; Hrešanová 2023). However, as we remember from our early childhood in state-socialist Czechoslovakia, the only opportunity to go and experience a glimpse of the 'West' was for us through holidays in Yugoslavia (see Taylor and Grandits 2010).

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