

LOVE AS PRACTICE OF SOLIDARITY: OF PERIPHERAL BODIES, EMBODIED
JUSTICE AND ASSOCIATED LABOR

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KEYWORDS

migrants, periphery, solidarity, affect, discourse, associated labor

PUBLICATION DATE

Issue 9, September 3, 2020

HOW TO CITE

Danijela Majstorović. "Love as Practice of Solidarity: Of Peripheral Bodies, Embodied Justice and Associated Labor." *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 9 (2020). <<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2020/15440/>>.

Permalink URL: <<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2020/15440/>>

URN: <urn:nbn:de:hebis:26-opus-154406>



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Abstract

The essay is a feminist auto-ethnographic exercise in which I reflect upon my activist and academic life in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and migrant life in Germany as *situated knowledges* (Haraway 1988), aiming to provide a basis for solidarity among various, power-differentiated communities. BiH has become Europe's "dumping ground" for non-European migrants but also a "waiting room" for its own citizens who are leaving as workforce to the EU. I juxtapose social protests and the post-2015 migrations from the Western Balkans to Germany — by which I was affected and now direct my research — with the Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian migrations to the EU via BiH analyzing exclusion across the board — from racial profiling in the US to the EU securitization practice of pushbacks, and Bosnian authorities' racism towards "migrants" as well as clientelism towards its own population leading to their migration.

Reshuffling the chronotopes of *here/there* and *now/then* destabilizes the center/periphery and individual/collective dichotomies as does *affective* vocabulary of bodies hurt or denied justice through wars, policing, privatizations, isolation, and violence. While going beyond identity politics as a mere counting and classification insistent on difference, I understand *love* as a fusion of a migrant's affect, as a particular, translatable consciousness about bodies, and *justice* as "the form in which and through which love performs its work" (Tillich 1954: 71). While *Black Lives Matter* slogan "no justice, no peace" or BiH protesters' shout 'justice for David and Dženan' signal an acute lack of justice globally, I conjoin these disparate struggles metaphorically through associated labor (Kardelj 1978) urging for love as a practice of solidarity in the 'post'-Corona world.

Loving and Leaving (across) the Periphery

On the eve of my third late spring in Frankfurt, there is the lightness and ease of being not *there* but *here*. The lindens in front of the windows give comfort, but I'm yearning for the sweetly pungent fragrance of their Banja Luka sisters. I will not be smelling them this June, or perhaps ever again for that matter, the borders have been closed again due to the corona pandemic. Their smell is from elsewhere and it won't be going anywhere — their labors are lost. Like in Safaa Fathy's 1999 *D'ailleurs Derrida*,¹ like in Beckett's 2010 *Poetics of elsewhere*,² like in Bekim Sejranović's 2008 *Nigdje, niotkuda (Nowhere, not from Anywhere)*,³ there is always an elsewhere and a nowhere across genres and in one's heart. It is from this elsewhere that is simultaneously a nowhere that I write about migrant's affect as a structure of feeling⁴ simultaneously marked by an excess of love for the (unbearable) place left and feeling "peripheral" in the new place. Migrant's affect is not just about oneself but is a particular, translatable consciousness about *other* bodies, killed, hurt or denied justice through wars, policing,

isolation and violence. It has a politicizing potential and can be a basis of solidarity across the globe.

The lightness doesn't come easily given the three months of the pandemic, the lockdown psychosis, more uncertainty than ever, and the conundrum from the pre-corona times persisting only worse: to go back or stay here forever? Although a refugee myself, I am now more privileged than many others in refugee camps around my former hometown of Bihać but we all yearn for an elsewhere the same, as much as we are all subjects to the EU securitization, humanitarianism, and labor/asylum regime. Albeit coming from various, power-differentiated communities, our experiences are similar when freedom, choice or mobility is restricted. For the able-bodied, documented, and otherwise privileged, it can be more comfortable, but for anyone teetering on the edge of survival it is mostly hell.

Leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina for me would be giving up on my tenured professorship, friends and family and looking for random jobs in Germany. Professorial ones are impossible to find, so it may end up in construction, care work, the food industry, or administration. As a Bosnian citizen I am allowed to participate in the job market even though Bosnia is not part of the EU. Many of my Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African counterparts aren't — they are stuck between the brutality of the situation in the camps in Bosnia and slim chances of ever being granted asylum in the EU. Yet how are we to carve alliances and bring solidarities if we forever insist on identity politics that is merely counting, classifying, and differentiating? One way of doing it is via feminist objectivity which is about “limited location and situated knowledge”⁵ by establishing “an earthwide network of connections including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different — and power-differentiated — communities [...] to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.”⁶

Going home without a chance to have a normal life or life at all is out of question for my counterparts and me alike. Writing about “normal lives” and the notion of the political in post-Dayton Bosnia, anthropologist Stef Jansen says that “the Dayton Agreement consolidated the results of the war, institutionalising national divisions in all polity organisation thus facilitating nationalist organising at the expense of all other forms of politics.”⁷ He takes the notion of “yearning” to recall bell hooks⁸ writing about the black liberation struggle in the U.S. where yearning “opens up the possibility of a

common ground on which a host of different desires might be articulated into a potential dynamic of change.”⁹ He found that yearning was a “shared space and feeling,” a mobilizing notion connecting “the longings, desires and fantasies of everyday life” to “the struggle for radical political change”¹⁰ in which normal life included “employment (‘who wanted to work, worked’ [ko je htio, radio je]), living standards, discipline, flat allocations, social welfare (free schooling, health care, sports and leisure, etc.) and, crucially, all this embedded in a ‘functioning system’ — an ‘ordered state’” in which “everyday life [was] oblivious to [daily] ‘politics.’”¹¹

My yearning incorporates the excess of love, a traction built up in simultaneous dwelling and exile in the so-called “center” and “periphery.” While there has to be a way out of reintroducing the grammars of modernity and colonialism in designating spatial inequality,¹² there is still a difficult-to-process bodily excess of people inhabiting such spaces. There are multiple structural and cultural “peripheries” and “peripheries within peripheries,” inhabited by *peripheral selves*, bodies conditioned by multiple oppressions including wars and policing, privatizations, denial of justice as well as various gatekeeping processes from within and without inhibiting the circulation of knowledge and people from such spaces. These oppressions include historical as well as more contemporary practices, from racial profiling in the US to racist securitization of the Croatian police’s pushbacks at the EU border. Some pertain to Bosnian authorities’ everyday racism and fascism towards “migrants” and the clientelist dispensing of jobs and justice leading its own working population into migration or suffering. BiH has become Europe’s “dumping ground” for non-European migrants but also a “waiting room” for its own citizens who are leaving as workforce to the EU. Although coming from power-differentiated communities, there is a potential of fusing or otherwise commonizing their “peripheralness” as collective experience of bodies who for a number of reasons have been oppressed by some center, chased away, hurt, imprisoned, locked, made ill or dead.

The urge to decolonize peripheries and what comes from peripheries has never been louder, echoing activist practices of solidarity seen in uniting, for instance, migrants’ and antifascist struggles. One such attempt is a German-based “Migrantifa” movement, established in Hessen after the Hanau murders on February 19th, 2020. It brings together the relevance of participating in antifascist and antiracist struggles and urging for solidarities more than ever especially in the wake of the US President Trump’s

attempting to declare ANTIFA a terrorist organization. Bringing antifascism and antiracism together opens up a space from which we begin to talk differently. To speak in terms of integration and fight for social justice as opposed to racism embedded in the enclosure or entrapment of refugee camps a.k.a. reception centers. It also opens up a space for grouping of different peripheralized subjects standing not only *against* insurgent fascism but also *for* a more inclusive global left politics exposing the existing and real “the existing and very real — dysfunctionalities of liberal political systems and the anxieties of mainstream societies to normalise poisonous incivility towards minority and non-native groups.”¹³ It opens a space for the excess of love to be politically articulated and police brutality and hate crimes against bodies fervently repudiated through the work of justice.

Love between Discourse and Bodies

I have come to Germany to do research about the third wave Bosnian migrants, who have since 2015 been coming to work, hoping to find answers for myself too. Studying their discourses revealed to me that people didn’t want their children “to live there,” *there* being Bosnia. They came to Germany because *here*, however slow, they hoped to make some progress and not go nowhere, “patter in place” — like some Sarajevans in Dobrinja some ten years after the war described as “non-progress in a life reduced to surviving through permanent chasing — itself seen to be the product of collective entrapment.”¹⁴

My respondents see any movement as better than stagnation, which is why they migrate, but movement itself is no guarantee of a better life. Just by moving one does not immediately climb up the social ladder but one hopes to survive and hopes his/her children will have a better starting point. What Oliver Nachtwey declares to be *Germany’s hidden crisis*¹⁵ is strongly reminiscent of what Laurent Berlant¹⁶ has termed *cruel optimism*: the imperative of hope for a better life against the systemic obstacle to the improvements developed industrial societies used to promise. Upward social mobility, the core promise of life in the “old” West German welfare state in which millions of skilled workers upgraded their VWs to Audis, bought their first homes and sent their children to university, was no longer possible and the gears of the so-called “elevator society” had long since ground to a halt. In the absence of the social mobility of yesterday, widespread social exhaustion and anxiety have emerged as dominant

social feelings of today. What are we to do with this imperative and with the systemic obstacles and the impeding intensity of bodies dying in their wake?

Taking the body as a site of affect's operation in culture means taking certain political body-sites across the affective terms such as intensity and relationality to use Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology.¹⁷ A cultural theory of affect is a theory of the body whereby the affective body is an event¹⁸ — “if there were no escape, no excess, no remainder, [...] the universe would be without potential, pure entropy, death. Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them. Their autonomy is the autonomy of affect.”¹⁹ According to Sedgwick “experience is organized inarticulately, it is felt and intuited rather than systematized, hovering ‘below the level of shape or structure’” in which “affect as excess is a kind of intensity, making a difference below the threshold of consciousness, thrusting the subject into particular kinds of relations with the material, and social world.”²⁰ A friend's mother died during the COVID 19 epidemic — he in Gothenburg, she in Sarajevo — he could not be there to bury her and he couldn't mourn in Sweden. He said he needed to be in Bosnia in order to mourn: the intensity of bodies only aggravated when thinking of homeland as the perfect place for mourning, not living.

In the same vein, despite all discursive bravuras in rationalizing about the pros and cons of migration and political struggles at home, affect stirred every time I thought of returning, a return to embracing my Balkan fate (or yoke), as if my entire autonomy was under attack. After all, I had already given my “best years” to trying to better things there including working at the university for almost twenty years and running an organization called *Center for social and cultural repair*. After all the political struggling against structural and symbolic violence in which I partook often fearing the police, now I felt despair knowing that change *there* was not really desired over *there* and that all resistance was a comradeless, solitary act in which one dies for nothing or is declared insane. Now, the return would mean being judged as a social misfit without a chance to live a full life because of the sharp social criticism that could never meaningfully get across in a politically depleted public sphere or the school curriculum. The return this time would be final, death-certain. There would be no more running away from Bosnia yet the transgenerational burdens and doubts would still be *there*.

Halfway through my research, the idea of returning to Bosnia is still a kind of blur and has (too) many question marks attached to it. It means admitting to powerlessness within the current regime even when it provisionally entails a hint of courage. Even though there is absence of open fire and war, there is a gaping absence of justice from the prewar and war times extending to the postwar era. When *Black Lives Matter* protesters across the globe shouted “no justice, no peace,” I thought of Tillich’s ontological analyses of justice as “the form in which and through which love performed its work.”²¹ Justice was “the channel through which the compulsive and forceful power of love was necessarily directed,”²² and whose violation meant rejection of an other’s power of being. To return would mean admitting to love but also to fear of the long spell of injustice difficult to break — just like my interviewees, I had fears for my child too.

Love as Justice

I had the feeling that my generation, as the first that did not have to go to the 1992–1995 war because we were underage at the time, was rendered historically irrelevant. It did little for posterity in terms of combating the swarming nationalism and occasional outbursts of fascisms pursuing indifference and liberal life choices when given an opportunity. Most of them were either disinterested or complicit in the ethnocapitalist games of the elites who have in the meantime seized all shared spaces while safely cushioned as directors of banks, museums, archives, administrators, doctors, and professors choosing not to see and voting the usual suspects, SNSD or SDA.²³ Being occasionally part of different groups of left-wing BiH activists, I could see that major hard-fought battles have been lost and a lot of people gone or tired to organize counterhegemonic attacks like we did when there were more of us and when we were stronger.

During my time in Germany, my friends would get unnerved sending me angry comments about the situation in Bosnia. One such instance was the “Mass for Bleiburg” — a service for Nazi collaborators and civilians previously held by the Catholic Church in Croatia in the Austrian town of Bleiburg where Croatia’s Nazi Ustasha regime troops had gone to surrender to the British forces. In May this year, the mass was moved to Sarajevo because of the coronavirus restrictions and because it had been banned in Austria. Some texted about the children’s history lessons on equating the roles of

Serbia's Chetniks and Yugoslav Partisans in the Second World War in Banja Luka elementary schools illustrating an ongoing clash over the memory of the antifascist national liberation struggle led by the communists, and this time with historical revisionists winning. "I can't take it anymore, I had to send you this. Look what the 5th graders learn in school. Up yours, you fascist bastards!" she said. I was bitter and wanted to know where she was when I was protesting with a group of friends and leftist activists on the Kozara mountain in July 2015 and 2016. We sang partisan songs at the state-sponsored commemoration of antifascism (a nationalist dog-and-pony show featuring a big cross instead of the red star, the Serb national anthem "Bože pravde" rather than the Yugoslav "Hej Sloveni," etc.) in a symbolic gesture of intervention against the state's official commemorative master narrative. Instead, I said, "that's why we are here. I hope you and your family are doing fine. Thanks for sharing this with me."

That was a line to hold, something to do, regardless of whether my "holding the line" was more Leninist, Maoist or Luxemburgian, lest it all melted into the pleasant postmodernist air like hundreds of postwar NGOs and their executives who climbed up the social and political ladders profiting from the misery of people they were ostensibly there to help. Sometimes the helpers were worse than the nationalists whose damage they were supposed to undo, but at least the nationalists did not pretend, I thought to myself.

"Back then," hopes still high and dreams alive, we were not loud enough to make the Prijedor authorities publicly commemorate what happened in the 1990s by building a monument for the 102 Prijedor children killed during the 1992–1995 war — the ultimate goal of the White armband day organized by a group of antifascists and *Jer me se tiče* (*Because it Concerns Me*) activists every 31st of May.²⁴ This wasting away has already taken its toll on the once material, tangible bodies of others — from Predrag Lucić and Borka Pavićević, to Mirjana Tešanović and Bekim Sejranović²⁵ to many other people with big hearts inscribed in the cultural cartographies of post-Yugoslav spaces, belonging to the same left front, shaping the language, staying honest, holding the line, but nevertheless going to die.

And it is not that we occasionally would not have "it." That temporary good feeling that followed occupying the streets, classrooms, and squares was to be replaced by a rude awakening to a new day with no political organization, no vision for the future,

no goals, and with people continuing to leave whether for economic reasons or political repression or just getting old in the post-Dayton *meantime*. In Tuzla, protesters even set the cantonal government buildings on fire in 2014 demanding a review of the privatizations in which former workers, the proverbial *losers of transition*, defended their right to work. Those days are gone, and as we enter our forties, the struggles appear to be more futile, the grind became more unbearable and stifling, my body less flexible, and life more ‘mean.’ My parents were the same age as I am now when the war started in Bosnia and their lives, like the lives of many others, were radically upturned too. Living in a different history, they were changed forever, forever chasing something they could not even remember the shape of: youth, a sense of worth, a better life, none of it mattered much anymore.

For Tillich, love exists in the polarity of estrangement and reunion whereby human being is always being under the conditions of existence.²⁶ As such, it is being experienced as estrangement from all other beings. Love, then, is the “drive towards the unity of the separated.”²⁷ Love constantly moves towards reunion and, in this way, finds itself “united with the compulsory elements of power” in order to “destroy what is against love.”²⁸ There are all those things I love there: the people, the nature, friendships more intimate than anywhere, the humor, coffee rituals, living in the common language and grammar and the post-Yugoslav cultural space — living a *fuller life*, not necessarily *better*. Living among the remnants of a *better past* of the former socialist state coupled by a burning desire for a future revolutionary political practice that would produce a new era (*nastati će novo doba*²⁹) and a tingling potential of what is to come. Yet this excess of love had a downside — a fear that everything had already been frittered away, spent or made completely unattainable as too much damage had been done, and too many people had died or left. With too little time and strength, I left too. I *repaired to* another country but that did not stop me from yearning.

A Tale of Two Bodies³⁰

I remember as a triggering event the ordeal that started when a politically powerful man whose politics were very different from mine sabotaged my tenure case in the university Senate without any opposition by the Senate members who uniformly marched to the beat of his drum. They insisted, contrary to the present evidence, that the work I published in the period between my assistant professorship and associate

professorship was to be completely disregarded because of its date. The tenure procedure dragged on from December 2017 until March 2018 when I almost lost my job. Fortunately, I had other published work to meet the legal minimum but it was an act of punishment and public humiliation for which nobody was held accountable, nobody was to “answer” to anyone, there was no *Verantwortung*. Soon after, my blood turned against my body staging a crazy autoimmune attack, the body against itself.

Just when the tenure hearing eventually resulted in my promotion to full professor in March 2018, a 21-year old man named David Dragičević was killed by what his father called ‘the State.’ Two years later, the murder strongly resonates with the murder of George Floyd. Young men from the region, David’s age and older, were already *en route* to Germany and Austria in their thousands, leaving never to return. In the midst “emptying” of bodies and souls, the protests started against the apparent police cover-up of David’s murder and the reluctance to initiate a proper investigation. I joined the protest and was then offered to translate David’s autopsy reports *pro bono*. What that work became made me think of what Anne Boyer said of hers:

Some days I would swear to you that nothing but this place exists. When I leave the occupied space of the city into the ordinary space of the city, the ordinary space has ceased to feel real. The ordinary world is a theme park now, faux-hygienic, grating, insincere. My feeling for the occupation is almost exactly like love, vulnerable and half-mad, but I am handing my heart not to another human but to an unfixated, circulating crowd. The stakes feel high, and I question my desire, my attachment, tell myself it is just a cold park, some strangers, the same sad world. But I’m pretty sure I’ve been waiting my whole life for this, pretty sure that we have made a rip in everything. And from the cut-that cold place-we shout.³¹

Standing with my kid in the center of Banja Luka following the days of David’s disappearance and murder, in the former Krajina square, now colloquially renamed “David’s Square,” I felt that it no longer felt real the way ordinary places do — it was filled with an excess of love and fear. I was absorbed in the “Justice for David” cause almost against my own volition, as if it had marked a point of no return. Within four months, in July 2018, I was ill as my own body stopped healing and producing thrombocytes only to start producing them again after the December 2018 protests in Banja Luka when we returned from Germany for Christmas holidays. Two movements arose out of these entanglements: the social movement “Justice for David” that aimed to shake up the stagnant political scene in Banja Luka and the country despite the police repression, and my own personal movement towards becoming a postsocialist

migrant³² — postsocialism being an awkward, possibly quite inadequate term to convey what was happening in the European periphery.

It was a tale of two bodies, mine and David's, as I felt myself entangled with his, the body fluids both poisonous and remedial. On December 30th, 2018, after five days of riots in the city, Davor Dragičević, David's charismatic father, was accused of attempting a *coup d'état*, which laid ground for his own exile too. He was on the doorstep of the Radio Television of Republika Srpska, but never entered the building as he knew there was a detail of special police waiting for him inside. After December 30th he disappeared in the Ferhadija mosque yard only to reappear as a political asylum seeker in Austria in January the following year. David's remains were buried in Banja Luka on April 7th 2018 but with Davor in exile, the parents decided to rebury him in Wiener Neustadt on March 15th 2019, where his mother Suzana lived. On March 15th 2020, when I finally stood at David's grave in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, marking the first anniversary of his reburial, the coronavirus entered into our lives. Buses of people from Banja Luka were supposed to arrive to the cemetery that day but instead only David's and my family stood there, in silence so loud, on a windy sunny Sunday afternoon. We could not stay much longer, Germany was about to close its borders the next day so we got into our car and came back *here* before it happened.

Just like many of the people I spoke with, I did not want my kid to live *there*, in this European, although not-yet-*EUropean* periphery because *Verantwortung* did not live there anymore and I would become very afraid of the police. Nobody would bear responsibility for the multiple expulsions of various populations of the 1990s (non-Serbs from Banja Luka and Prijedor, Serbs from Bihać and Sarajevo, Croats from Travnik and Zenica etc.); for the chaotic and catastrophic privatizations of the early 2000s; for various other acts of violence that would mostly go undetected institutionally weakening whatever there was left of the State and the hope that it could promise or stand for a society.

Nobody close to power ever went to prison. The "state" now rarely implied the nation-state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of the proliferation of younger, mostly non-aligned authors (Lana Bastašić, Rumena Bužarovska, Lejla Kalamujić, Bojan Krivokapić, Dijala Hasanbegović, Senka Marić, Bekim Sejranović, Tanja Stupar-Trifunović, Faruk Šehić, Tanja Šljivar, and Marko Tomaš to name but a few), one could occasionally see the contours of the new Yugoslav space on paper. But the

notion of state simultaneously kept shrinking and expanding: sometimes the “State” meant Republika Srpska (the Serb “entity” delimited by the Dayton Agreement), and at other times it referred to the “Sarajevo Canton.” The implied “state” reflected the lived experience that resembled George Jackson’s description and analysis of fascism inherent in the American racist repressive apparatus in *Soledad Brother!* “The fascist ideal doesn’t really take hold until one gets into the upper levels of the power pyramid of a police state” [...] “wherein the political ascendancy is tied into and protects the interests of the upper class — characterized by militarism, racism, and imperialism.”³³

It is difficult to be on the losing end for too long and without *comrades*; the alternative is a relatively numb, suspended existence in which you perform biological and parental functions but in which your aesthetic, political, social, and spiritual needs are not really met. Just like in some survival mode, just like us, our existing comrades got tired, depleted, burnt out, ill, or ready to assume care work jobs in Germany. Some are no longer comrades. Now we zoom, skype, argue, and drink with those we love. There is nothing left *there* anymore except the green, lush rivers of Una and Vrbas delineating my native geography, some familiar infrastructure close to the eye, awkward family dinners that break your heart because nationalism has also crept into their hearts by now. They are just being too stubborn to see their children are leaving for lack of air, too old to change the way things were. Too many people are obsessing over resolving “the national question,” but are not ready to heal their postsocialist wound still frozen in their war trauma and the PTSD, letting the elites squander the little there was left mirroring their EU counterparts in hostility towards the new migrants. No, it would not be good for the kid to live in such a State. There is no more air to breathe and no more ways to move *there* untouched by ethnocapitalist Bosnian or the European racist politics but it comforts to see the fronts opening up elsewhere.

Love as Associated Labor (udruženi rad): Migrants Associated

It is not enough to say that we, as migrants and future warriors, have been burdened by various forms of oppression — racial, ethnic, class, gender or otherwise — , propelling us as if through some mysterious labyrinth, not allowing the warrior, to use Audre Lorde’s language, to be awakened by a new consciousness.³⁴ To awaken the inner warrior is to recognize her/him when you see her/him and when “circumstantial” lines between a Bosnian and a Kenyan cross, just like that time when Ann vividly talked

about the Nairobi of her youth invoking images of Bosnia in my mind. As the sun was setting in Bad Nauheim, we smoked cigarettes on her balcony wondering how we ended up *here*: migrant, never static, both moving a lot in the United States in our twenties, never really settling anywhere but yearning to get settled. Last year learning German together, this year meeting at the protests, not only have we become friends but have also intertwined beyond any imaginable identity politics. The excess of feeling peripheral, the wounds felt for others and ourselves, the urge to escape — we both understood what they meant.

Dževad Karahasan once said that Bosnia has “always been a space that people leave, run away from or are chased away from, and all the lucky ones who leave, run or get chased away from, even without knowing it, become Bosnians the moment they settle somewhere else [...] Why is that so? Why do Bosnians [...] become such passionate patriots when they leave yet cannot but hate their region when they are doomed to live in it?”³⁵ Doomed to life in Bosnia means yearning for an elsewhere like Germany, while staying in Germany means yearning for homeland — living in a permanent *elsewhere* is illustrative of this split, without a chance to live life to the fullest until the reunion but even then, only for a moment.

What can the Balkan experience tell Africans, Syrians, Indigenous, African Americans and vice versa? How are we to learn from and listen to one another, we as subjects of colonialism, neoliberalism, fascism, patriarchy, imperialism? The future warriors? The anti-Semitic read as anti-somatic makes multiple oppressions more visible and palpable, to be a racist eventually means to be against most bodies, black, Jewish, Muslim, Yugoslav. It is often class, ethnicity and gender of course, but I think skin color more than anything surmises the affective excess of another body because it is the most visible. The question “are you a member of a visible minority” deafens. Am I? A privileged white woman somehow always less white in the EU? My Middle-Eastern looking Bosnian husband certainly is. And the Hanau murderer Tobias Rathjen during his murderous spree on February 19th 2020 could have ‘easily mistaken’ him for a Syrian passer-by.

Our differences and privileges may vary, but we, however unevenly, are all in this together, it is a matter of time when “surplus populations”³⁶ of incoming Middle Eastern refugees will be recognized as bodies that can be taken by contemporary capitalism as living labor or killed by its war machine, as was the case in the 1990s, as

is the case now in Syria, as will be the case in the future wars whose shape is still unknown. So far, the Western Balkanites and Eastern Europeans have been taken as living labor but only to fill the ‘vacant’ positions of asparagus pickers, care workers, waiters, *Baustelle* (construction) workers, helping to reduce the numbers of asylum requests only by being absorbed into the available form of capitalism and not the credo of human rights.

Is migration really cowardice or an act of bravery? Is it merely a *nužda*, as a necessity, but also as biological need such as defecation (*velika nužda*) or urination (*mala nužda*) — part of Appadurai’s mixing of metaphors when talking about “politics of shit” and “biology of bodies?”³⁷ Is by the act of one’s leaving one surrendering to taking part in the struggles back home because as the rules of the ‘game’ change and the police become crueler? ‘The game’ is migrants’ lingo for crossing the border cutting through the non-European, European, and EUropean space despite Europe’s pushback but rules of game also apply to all of us not willing to indulge in Serb, Croatian, and Bosniak fascisms, Serb, Croatian, and Bosniak short-term *jaran* (buddy) deals in privatization, dispensing jobs, killing their own and other nations’ populations and avoiding justice. Sometimes, one just must leave submitting to the necessity of migration as sheer biological need to survive as well as to defecate.

No, we are not the same. Yes, we are the same. Stop equating, stop measuring, dead bodies are not just to be counted, but felt, smelled, touched, like in that room in Srebrenica and the Tuzla forensic center. There were mortal remains left behind by the Hurricane Katrina as well, out *there*, and the postcolonial bodies were counted, the peripheral bones measured, racialized, and gendered when needed.³⁸ But alliances, they need to be fraught by the people holding the line. Our positionalities, our postcolonialities, our peripheralities are competing with other more privileged Europeans on the labor market instead of seizing the opportunity to repair and revolutionize what we have already had.

What can we possibly do? Illness can get the best of us, and those with bigger hearts are the easier targets, Sejranović would say. Sejranović, another migrant subject, another Middle-Eastern looking Bosnian, just like my husband, recently died in my hometown of Banja Luka, out of the blue. Many people in Banja Luka die out of the blue. That’s why I fled; I was afraid of dying, or rather, of living in the silence and inaction. That it would be another lost labor of love. I don’t want to lose that labor but

build upon it, mine, yours, theirs. Make it *Ours* just like in an OOUR, the basic organization of associated labor aiming to disalienate labor through democratization of industry once imaginable in the Yugoslav self-management.³⁹ Just as “single worker’s product could no longer be expressed as a product of his/her individual labor but as a product of associated, so to say social labor,”⁴⁰ single particular struggles against racism and injustice need to become more integrated globally. If staying means acquiescing to injustice, leaving means becoming and meeting political asylum seekers all over Europe, former and future friends and comrades, wandering about West European countries whose administrations prolong their asylum procedures, unwilling to admit the obvious, that “Bosnia is not a safe country.”

I chose to leave when I had an opportunity to fight with an even greater vigor taking a moment of respite. If I went back, it would be to the abandoned ancestral land by the Una river to build a house for undocumented young Middle Eastern migrants risking their lives daily. To settle would be to inhabit that house, a social center of sorts, like the Banjaluka Social Center (BASOC).⁴¹ To collectively occupy a space where something would be repaired, some solidarity enacted, some labor paid off. My last name is Majstorović, from *majstor*, a crafts(wo)man, I repair.

P.S.

Dear M.,

You asked me recently how I have been. At 13 I was in Bosnia — the war happened, at 23 in America — on September 11. At 35 I was in Canada, bedbugs had infested our apartment the day before I was to give birth to my son, Vuk, and eight months later, just days before going back to Bosnia, we had a fire too. At 40 I fought some important battles, won, then suddenly fell ill. At 41, Coronavirus hit the world while hitting us all. We were OK but I kept hearing about the full-to-the brim Offenbach Frauenhäuser (women’s shelters), people’s PTSD reactivated, hundreds of thousands of soon-to-be-dead Americans, and a healthcare system in the periphery falling apart. Have those of us with greater experience of pain developed greater resilience or is it about the threshold that wavers regardless? Do we forever stay equally frightened in the face of adversity, checking for papers, passports, bites, bruises, blood counts, breathing.

Coping for now, but I'm hoping for a swim on the Adriatic before we all awaken in a frightful, jobless, authoritarian, and cruel world lest we dare reimagine it otherwise. Lest the war keep happening. It's communism all over again. Or barbarity. Kiss the children for me. Go get some sun on your bike soon.

P.S. Since the pandemic, the memory of reading about Anne Frank's diary of a horror that she at the time knew no name for often comes to mind. Back then as well as right now, movement is limited and attentiveness to detail is everything. I make lists, find joy in simple things like freshly ground coffee, board games, and laughs with Vuk. Right now we're all yearning for some normalcy in this suspended state. Nobody knows what life will be like politically or economically post-Corona and what kind of future we will be able to imagine. It will pass though, everything does.

Love,

Danijela

Endnotes

- ¹ *Derrida's Elsewhere* (original title: *D'ailleurs Derrida*), dir. Safaa Fathy (France: Gloria Films Productions, 1999), DVD.
- ² Sjef Houppermans, Anglea Mooriani, Daniele de Ruyter Tognotti, Matthijs Engelberts and Dirk Van Hulle, eds., *Where Never Before: Beckett's Poetics of Elsewhere: La poétique de l'ailleurs* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2009).
- ³ Bekim Sejranović, *Nigdje, niotkuda* (Sarajevo: Buybook, Profil, 2008).
- ⁴ The structure of feeling emphasizes "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" in which "structure is set with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension," Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.
- ⁵ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988), 575–599, here: 583.
- ⁶ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 580.
- ⁷ Stef Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime: 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 174.
- ⁸ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1990).
- ⁹ hooks, *Yearning*, 12–13.
- ¹⁰ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, 56.
- ¹¹ Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, 163–164.

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- 12 Ann Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," in *Cultural Anthropology* 23.2 (2008), 191–219.
- 13 Aristotle Kallis, "The Return of Fascism? Why This Is the Wrong Question to Ask," in *The Conversation*, April 16, 2019, accessed June 12, 2020, <<https://theconversation.com/the-return-of-fascism-why-this-is-the-wrong-question-to-ask-114468>>.
- 14 Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime*, 173.
- 15 Oliver Nachtwey, *Germany's Hidden Crisis: Social Decline in the Heart of Europe* (London: Verso, 2018).
- 16 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 17 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- 18 Jenny Edbauer, "Executive Overspill: Affective Bodies, Intensity, and Bush-In Relation," in *Postmodern Culture* 15.1 (2004), DOI:10.1353/pmc.2004.0037.
- 19 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 35.
- 20 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press), 16.
- 21 Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 71.
- 22 W. G. Dalton, book review of Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), accessed June 20, 2020, <[http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/tillich/resources/review_tillich-paul_love_power_justice.htm#Review by WGD](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/tillich/resources/review_tillich-paul_love_power_justice.htm#Review_by_WGD)>.
- 23 SNSD (Savez nezavisnih socijal-demokrata) (eng. Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) and SDA (Stranka demokratske akcije) (eng. Party of Democratic Action), one predominantly Serb and the other Bosniak, are to largest parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- 24 <<https://remembermeproject.wordpress.com/2018/04/20/commemorating-white-armband-day-transnationally-and-in-virtual-spaces/>>.
- 25 I knew the first three of them personally and have twice met Sejranović <<https://balkaninsight.com/2018/01/10/predrag-lucic-made-us-laugh-sing-and-cry-01-10-2018/>>; <<https://globalvoices.org/2019/07/07/death-of-a-fighter-post-yugoslav-civil-society-bids-farewell-to-dissident-playwright-borka-pavicevic/>>; <<https://radiosarajevo.ba/metromahala/lica/napustilanas-je-mirjana-tesanovic-novinarka-velikog-srca/355213>>; <<https://www.partner-propaganda.de/en/authors/bekim-sejranovic.html>>.
- 26 Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 25.
- 27 Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 25.
- 28 Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, 50.
- 29 A line from a famous partisan movie "The Battle of Neretva" while the soundtrack is the old Croatian revolutionary song "Fall of force and injustice" (originally titled: "Padaj silo i nepravdo"), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRPW5YPrEhc>>.
- 30 I am indebted to Azra Hromadžić for pointing me to think in this direction.
- 31 Ann Boyer, "Kansas City," in *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018), 31.

- 32 Špela Drnovšek-Zorko, “Uneasy Solidarities? Migrant Encounters between Post Socialism and Postcolonialism,” in special issue of *Dversia* 3.19 (*Decolonial Theory and Practice in South-East Europe*, eds. Polina Manolova, Katarina Kušić and Philipp Lottholz) (2019), 151–167, accessed June 25, 2020, <<https://dversia.net/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2019/06/special-issue.pdf>>.
- 33 George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Publishing, 1994), 18.
- 34 This is taken from a documentary directed by Dagmar Schultz, *Audre Lord: The Berlin Years 1984–1992* (Germany: Third World Newsreel Film Collective, 2012), DVD.
- 35 This is my own translation of an excerpt from Dževad Karahasan, *Šahrijarov prsten* (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2017), 65.
- 36 Prem Kumar Rajaram, “Refugees as Surplus Population: Race, Migration and Capitalist Value Regimes,” in *New Political Economy* 23.5 (2018), 627–639, DOI: [10.1080/13563467.2017.1417372](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2017.1417372).
- 37 Arjun Appadurai, “Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics,” in *Environment & Urbanization* 13.2 (2001), 23–43.
- 38 Damir Arsenijević, “Gendering the Bone: The Politics of Memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in *Journal for Cultural Research* 15.2 (2011), 193–205.
- 39 For more on associated labor, “boalization” and its organization in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, aside from Edvard Kardelj’s *Udruženi rad i samoupravno planiranje* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1979), consult Dejan Jović’s *A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009) and Branislav Jakovljević’s *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945–91* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016).
- 40 Edvard Kardelj, *Udruženi rad i samoupravno planiranje* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1979), 8.
- 41 <<https://www.facebook.com/bassoc/>>.