A LACUNA OF NORMALCY

EXPLORING THE CONTINGENCIES OF NEOLIBERALIZATION IN THE CASE OF RAILWAY WORKERS IN ZAJEČAR

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary
2014

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to offer a reconstruction of macro processes of the changes that the state and the railway company have undergone since the socialist period by uncovering the intimate ways in which the railway workers perceive and relate to these changes. The question I answer is: how do workers navigate and negotiate the changing historical conditions – simultaneously material, social, and ideational – and why is there no visible political struggle against them? The political economic and governmentality approaches in studying neoliberalism are connected via the notion of the field of force. The cross-conjunctural analysis shows that the contingent dynamics of contestation of and consent to hegemony in the case of railway workers is embedded in the wider constraining effects of global capitalism, national circumstances, and company policies. The perceptions of the changes are a structured outcome within the field of force neoliberalization with the common discursive framework of the future possibilities. This framework either gets partially accepted or breaks down, but its material and social instantiations circumscribe the possibilities for opposition to include only the discursive critique and exclude more dangerous political articulation.

Acknowledgements

Science is a collective endeavor, but arguably, anthropology most of all. We learn from our interlocutors in the field, from our friends, from the media, from the silent streets of cities that we walk through. Extending one's thanks thus becomes a difficult task, but all the more necessary. I would like to thank the people I talked to in Zaječar. I hope I have managed to understand and present their fears and hopes, I apologize in advance if I have not. The steps in the long walk towards this thesis were numerous, but importantly marked by discussions in classrooms and on less formal occasions with professors from CEU: Violetta Zentai, Andreas Dafinger, Alexandra Kowalski, Dorit Geva, John Clarke, János Kovács, and others. A special thanks goes to my supervisor Don Kalb for thought-provoking guidance. I also wish to thank the readers who have contributed to this thesis by addressing comments, questions, and critiques in the various stages of the writing: Ágnes Tóth from the Academic Writing Center, Stefan Guga, Natalia Buier, George Iordachescu, Erzsébet Gulyás, Júlia Perczel, Sugandha Nagpal. Čarna Brković and Marko Balažević deserve a special mention for good discussions and friendship on the side. My parents, family, and friends all over the world are too numerous to be mentioned by names, but their support and love are invaluable. Finally, thanks to Ashley Moore for enriching my life with her presence.

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1. Introduction

The dominant discourse in explaining post-socialist transformation has been the transition narrative which assumed that there is a clear-cut difference between the period of communism or socialism and the future in a functioning market-system. The former was negatively connoted, the latter positively: whereas communism stood for insecurity, lack of goods, and fear, the market was supposed to bring about security, abundance, and freedom. However, for the "regular people" on the ground, things were much different. Ethnographic reality captured by many anthropologists and sociologists provides ample evidence that transition was neither clear cut nor seen as such a positive experience (Pine and Bridger 1998). Researchers focused on property transformation, which often resulted in finding alternative subsistence strategies to cope with the dispossession and the disorganization of workers, the changing regimes of labor such as disciplining within the workplace, and changes in subjectivity (e.g. Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 2009; Carrier and Kalb forthcoming; Hann 2002; Kasmir and Carbonella forthcoming; Verdery and Humphrey 2004). In a word, they were studying neoliberalization in the post-socialist context.

The experience of socialist self-management in Yugoslavia, the primitive accumulation in the wartime, and the recent liberalization and privatization resulted in the contingent outcomes of the process of neoliberalization in Serbia. Privatization, the introduction of competition in the market instead of state monopolies, and supervisory workfare are usually seen as part and parcel of neoliberalization. The bundle of processes is usually observed in the West, however, these processes do not necessarily go together, either in the West or in different contexts (Collier 2012, Hilgers 2012, Peck and Theodore 2012).

For example, Serbian Railways can be examined as a case where some of these processes are taking place, but not in a neat bundle that could be seen within a modernization teleology of neoliberalization. Most Serbian companies have already been privatized, but some of the largest companies remain publicly owned and run, one of which is the railway company. Even though its privatization and restructuring has been publicly debated, it has not undergone a thorough

reorganization yet. However, the state – and thus the Railways as a large state-owned company – has undergone many changes since the Second World War, and especially in the turbulent period of the 1990s and the period of fast liberalization after 2000 driven and justified by the accession into the European Union and other international organizations. My research explores the contingent outcomes of neoliberalization in the state-owned railway company from the perspective of it workers. I view this case as a critical junction where global processes are played out in "emergent and situated events and narratives [within] the particular national arenas and local histories [...] overdetermined by systemic relationships of inequality, power and dependence" (Kalb 2011).

I focus on the town of Zaječar in order to understand the workers' perception of these changes and their consequences. The location was chosen according to it relative position in the railway network and the position of the town. Zaječar, a town of around 60.000 people, is located in eastern Serbia, which is considered to be the poorest region. The position of the town in the railway network is peripheral. There are three railway routes in the Zaječar junction, connecting the town with Niš,[1] Majdanpek,[2] and Prahovo.[3]

The railway in this junction is used to transport both cargo and passengers. There is a general fear that the railway company needs to be downsized in order to be profitable[4] and the explanations usually have to do with alleged plans to reduce subsidies because of IMF recommendations (Bosnić n/a). Due to severe infrastructural problems and the lack of functional locomotives the transport is constrained in this region (Ristić 2013). Notwithstanding the bad conditions for passenger travel compared to other forms of transportation, there still remains a significant number of passengers. Lines are rescheduled and canceled relatively often (Telegraf

1Niš is the biggest city in southern and eastern Serbia, part of the main railway line (Belgrade-Niš). It provides both national and international connections: to Istanbul (via Sofia), and Thessaloniki and Athens (via Skopje).
2This route goes through Bor, the most important mining center in the eastern Serbia because of its mining and smelting complex which is one of the most important customers in cargo transportation in Serbia. Although there are no direct passenger trains from Zaječar to Belgrade, this route also offers the connection via the line Majdanpek-Požarevac-Belgrade.
3Prahovo is a port town on the Danube river, near the town of Negotin.
4This is a highly contested claim (for example by referring to the examples of the largest national railways, such as the French, German, or Japanese ones) since the idea that the railways needs to be profitable is new and very much in contrast with the way the railways are often perceived in Serbia. I will expand on this point later.

2013). Zaječar's position on a peripheral railway route makes it less important in comparison with widely used, internationally integrated lines such as Belgrade-Niš, which led me to believe that the position of the railway workers in this town would be more more precarious than in other parts of Serbia. In conjunction with the generally bad condition of the economy in the town, all of this led me to expect the perception of the changing state and company to be crystallized more clearly, making Zaječar a suitable location for research.

The time I spent in Zaječar was in the middle of the turbulence within the company. The critiques and accusations against the current top management were often voiced in the media and there had been a small protest organized requesting the change of management. My interlocutors were often wondering as to what my interest in talking to the railway workers might be. Some of them refused to talk to me or be recorded probably out of fear that it might have consequences on their position.

However, this defined my positioning less than my childhood in the small town on the Belgrade-Niš line with a large percentage of the working population being employed by the railways. I used the connections from this town to obtain contacts with my interlocutors in Zaječar. I used my biography to help my interlocutors position me when I approached them. Knowing the context in my hometown, I was attuned to the some of the issues that the railway company and its workers and their families face. However, the context I had come from was also significantly different from the context of Zaječar, so that my interlocutors often compared their situation with the situation in my hometown and pointed out its difference rather than dismissing me as a full "native" who knew everything and did not need to be told about it.

The aim of this thesis is to offer a reconstruction (Burawoy 1998) of macro processes of the changes that the state and the railway company have undergone from the socialist period. I reconstruct them by uncovering the intimate ways in which the railway workers perceive and relate to these changes. In other words, the question is: how do workers navigate and negotiate the changing historical conditions – simultaneously material, social, and ideational – and why is there

no visible political struggle against them? To answer this question, I have connected the political economic and governmentality approaches in studying neoliberalism via the notion of the field of force (cf. Roseberry 1994) which lends itself to an analysis which encompasses scales of research allowing the contingent dynamics of political contestation and consent to be understood as embedded in the wider constraining effects of tactical and structural power (cf. Wolf 1990).

1.1. On Methodology and the Structure of the Thesis

I have based my approach on ethnography focused on the railway workers in a mid-size town in Serbia. I have grounded my analysis in a particular reading of the recent developments in the history of capitalism. First, I draw from the two strands of the theory dealing with the process of neoliberalization world-wide: one focusing on political economy and the other focusing on governmentality. Further, I narrow the focus conceptually and geographically. Conceptually, I pay particular attention to the process of dispossession which is developed from the Marxist notion of primitive accumulation. Geographically, I pay closer attention to the post-socialist contexts in Europe.

I emphasize the possibility of contingent outcomes of the process of neoliberalization and specifically dispossession due to the differential histories of particular locations. To anchor the ethnography, I recount the history of Yugoslavia and Serbia with the connections to the global dynamics of capitalism as a focal point. That reading is derived mainly from the secondary sources exploring the political economy of socialism and post-socialism in the Yugoslav space.

I pay attention to the dynamic of primitive accumulation during the wars that marked the breakup of the country, as well as the accumulation through privatization after the liberalization in the 2000s. I have supplanted this reading with my interpretation of the post-2000 data on privatizations in Serbia to show that this process is drawing to a close with extreme measures such as privatization of the few strategic companies that are still state-owned or radical reductions in the workers' rights and price of labor as distinct possibilities on the horizon.

I reconstruct this history from my interlocutors' narratives. In the two ethnographic chapters I present first the views on the past and then the ideas about the present and the expectations of the future. In order to do so, I have conducted deep, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with blue-collar workers, low-level managers, and union leaders from Zaječar. I have conducted some interviews in the workplace of my interlocutors, which allowed me to conduct participant observation, although to a limited extent.

I have supplemented the insights gained in this way with conversations with family members of some workers, a doctor in the clinic that had been specialized for railway workers until approximately ten years ago,[5] a low-level manager in the state employment agency in Zaječar, and a worker in the company railways in the RTB Bor.[6] I paid attention not only to what my interlocutors said, but also to the tacit knowledge which constituted the background of their everyday interactions as well as their interaction with me. I used participant observation in the work environment and in the town of Zaječar in order to uncover unexplicated and unacknowledged aspects of present day relations and understand how the workers had adapted to new conditions or how new relations (including new hierarchies) developed. I ethnographically located the narratives and practices to explore the nexus where ideas about the economy, the politics, and the state intersect.

Finally, I consider the possibility of connecting the political economy and the governmentality literature on neoliberalization, or specifically literature on dispossession and disorganization with the literature on subjectivities in the sense of Foucauldian theory of subjectification and its appropriation in economic geography (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006) via the Gramscian notion of the field of force (Roseberry 1994). I offer the discussion on this possible

5The medical center used to be specialized for railway workers, but now it works dominantly with civilians. The changes that the medical care provision for the railways workers had undergone consist of the reductions of prophylactic care such as the mandatory periodical exams for all workers and the discontinuation of mandatory exams before every train ride for locomotive and shunter drivers. According to the doctor I spoke to, the changes are due to the impossibility of the Railways to service a huge debt to the Fund for Health Care.

6Rudarsko-topioničarski basen Bor (Mining and Smelting Basin Bor) is one of the largest companies in Eastern Serbia, located approximately thirty kilometers from Zaječar, and often referred to as the most important business partner of the regional railways. As many other big industrial complexes, it has its own transport sector which includes the company railways that transports the cargo between the factory and the cargo station in Bor where the state-owned railways take over. According to my interlocutors, the workers of RTB Bor had better salaries compared to the employees of the state-owned railways.

extension of the existing theory (Burawoy 1998) in the conclusion of my thesis.

2. Theoretical overview

In this chapter I will give an overview of the literature on the process of neoliberalization, with a specific focus on dispossession in post-socialism. I will present to strands of theories – those concerned with political economy on the one hand, and those concerned with governmentality and subjectivity on the other. I emphasize the potential for contingencies of this process and argue for the Gramscian notion of the field of force as a concept that can help in undertanding them.

2.1. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is usually taken to be "a set of ideas about how to organize markets, states, enterprises, and populations, which shape government policies" (Bockman 2011: 4). The crucial element of neoliberalism is the belief that competitive markets allow for the price formation which is more just and effective than when prices are set by the government. For this to happen, the states must be made stronger – or even authoritarian – in order to create and protect private property, and create functioning markets. The states also must be reduced and embrace capitalism in which hierarchical firms could function according to the principle of profit seeking. The nature of the neoliberal program is political, and it is realized in various forms through the reconfiguration and redeployment of states, rather than the withdrawal of the state as the popular myths would have it (Peck and Theodore 2012: 181).

2.1.1. Towards a processual definition

I take this as a loose definition of neoliberalism, but it is far from unanimously accepted. The search for an authoritative definition might be harmful if one is to cover the vast range of differences that the term is applied to in its different temporal and spatial instantiations. A better strategy is to consider neoliberalism as an abstraction of contemporary social, economic, and ideational outcomes of the process that we may name neoliberalization.

I propose this rhetorical maneuver not in order to give a circular definition, but to point to

the dynamic characteristics of the process that have a degree of internal coherence which is provided "by the combination of a logic of market rationality, a conception of personhood (centered on, but not exclusive to, human individuals), a calculating framework of efficiency, and a view of authority as a fundamental political and social bond" (Clarke 2008: 141), while at the same time allowing the possibility to be attentive to its contingencies.

2.1.2. The subjects of neoliberalization

This maneuver also provides the possibility to abandon the idea that neoliberalization requires subjects who actively and consciously work on installing neoliberal principles. The term neoliberalism is operationalized in various ways in social sciences, but there is a continuum between the structural approach emphasizing political economy and the approach employing the notion of governmentality at its extremes (cf. Clarke 2008, Collier 2012), both being anti-humanist in the sense of refusing to center their explanations on conscious individual subjects.

However, both approaches can be criticized if they rely on teleological assumptions about the outcomes of the process of neoliberalization. In the case of the structural approach, the dominant assumption is that the state transforms in specific ways to allow the capital to extract surplus value more efficiently. On the other hand, the approach that focuses on the practices of governmentality views the reshaping of political and economic subjects and populations through the process of flexibilization of production and privatization of state services. Anthropology is in a unique position to challenge these teleological assumptions by scrutinizing specific ethnographic contexts in order to uncover the contingencies they entail.

The hard core of the process in both theories is the "economic", be it the "material substructure of forces, relations, and interests (which may be more or less directly expressed in political and ideological forms); [or the] view of the 'economic' as those practices, relationships, and forms of organization that are discursively constituted as economic through governmental work" (Clarke 2008: 137).

But in either case, neoliberalization manifests itself simultaneously as material, social, and cultural, relying on the overarching institutions of the state. Redeployment of these institutions has been ethnographically explored by focusing on the way the bureaucratic field changes so that the the upper strata rich in economic and cultural capital have their life options expanded while the lower strata are punished. This phenomenon is what Wacquant calls the Centaur-state (2012: 73-74). The state is more present and visible because it is capable of coercion and at the same time more absent and weak because it is incapable of fulfilling its social obligations (Hilgers 2012: 85).

2.1.3. Contingencies of neoliberalization

The two approaches need not be considered opposed to one another. Rather, they can be complementary if they are connected by the notion of hegemony, or rather, the field of force which circumscribes the possibilities for contestation and consent (Roseberry 1994: 358). The notion of hegemony, or the field of force is profoundly historical, which is exactly what is required to explain the differences in the way neoliberal projects are implemented (cf. Hilgers 2012: 89). Actually existing neoliberalism does not have a consciously articulated ideational program as its hard core from which "deviations" could be calibrated. There are series of "localised manifestations, the mutual referentiality and interdependences of which have deepened and densified with time, in the context of continued uneven development rather than simple convergence" (Peck and Theodore 2012: 183). Thus, the effects of state policies can be long lasting because specific cultures and subjectivities develop within the constraints that those policies circumscribe (Hilgers 2012: 91, cf. Roseberry 1994: 365).

Rather than talking about neoliberal project as a stable and coherent order, utilizing the language of neoliberalization allows envisioning a contradictory process of state restructuring, which may, but need not always include "fiscal restraint, tax aversion and a preference for individualised, market-oriented approaches" (Peck and Theodore 2012: 179). To understand these contextually specific forms that neoliberalism takes, cross-case and cross-conjunctional modes of

analysis must be employed rather than extrapolations from different sites. Differentiating between the level of the capitalist system which acts as structural power as opposed to the level of neoliberalism as a political project which acts as tactical power can show how sovereignty of the nation-state has been eroded in similar ways that can be termed structured contingencies: neither fully determined by structural forces nor fully contingent (Kalb 2012, cf. Wolf 1990).

Since it does not operate according to a universal set of principles, and since economic aspects are determined by social and cultural aspects (and determine them in turn), the spread of neoliberalism should not be taken for granted but rather examined "as an assemblage of technologies, techniques, and practices that are appropriated selectively, that come into uncomfortable encounters with 'local' politics and cultures, and that are mobile and connective (rather than 'global')" (Ong 2006, quoted in Clarke 2008: 138). Ong's work is connected to the governmentality approach, but this insight is valuable for the political economic approach as well, because neoliberal technologies, techniques, and practices become (or fail to become) the organizing principles for the places in which they appear, or in other words, a hegemonic project which dominates in the economic, intellectual, and political field by constituting a historic bloc (Hall 1988, quoted in Nonini 2008: 152, cf. Roseberry 1994).

2.2. Class and Labor

Starting from the changes in economic relations due to neoliberalization, various authors have ethnographically located rearticulations of social relations (Carbonella and Kasmir forthcoming, Kalb forthcoming), as well as shifts in subjectivities and narratives (Gibson-Graham 2006, Kalb 2011, Narotzky forthcoming). Neoliberalization brings about a new form of accumulation through dispossession. Insisting on the rearticulation of the state and the changes in the bureaucratic field is only one side of the story. There exist fragile class and political alliances forming within unequal relationships that appear as consensus. The analysis of the rearticulation of the state needs to be complemented by analysis of how contradiction, contestation, and ambivalence

spring up as reactions to neoliberal policies resulting in complex processes of class formation driven by global capitalism which, after its consolidation in the West, found new territories including those in the former socialist Eurasia.

Workers in many contexts describe their experience in terms of defeat, suffering, and struggle Narotzky (forthcoming). Their defeat, as the material condition embodied as the experience of suffering, can be mobilized to produce a collective identity.However, although some forms of collective action emerge, the working class is far from achieving unity. One of the crucial effects of the specter of wageless life (Denning 2008, quoted in Carbonella and Kasmir forthcoming) in the current neoliberal accumulation is the production of difference and disorganization due to the fact that dispossession does not affect homogeneously the whole working class. Thus certain parts of the working class can be co-opted in achieving the technical guidelines of macroeconomic planning by the technocratic governments. Traditional "fordist" forms of production give way to a "flexible" working class.

2.2.1. Dispossession in post-socialism

Scrutiny of the empirical findings from Central and Eastern Europe show that classes are contingently made and unmade, which plays out in kin relations, belief, social organizations, and work relationships, among other things. Even though neoliberalization was presented as middle-class making project, it failed in this respect in this part of the world. The integration of this part of Europe into the global capitalist system happened because of the un-payable debts and industrial stagnation (Kalb 2012: 326-327). The capital that came was both labor-seeking and speculative, but the area was far from saturated by the capital inflow (Kalb 2002: 326). Parallel with the inclusion of a large number of workers into the global capitalist economy, many who were previously included in the socialist economy became unemployed, before or after the privatization of their companies. Privatization – as a form of dispossession – is the economic phenomenon characteristic of neoliberalization that has traveled well into this part of the globe. David Harvey writes:

> As more and more of the surplus created yesterday is converted into fresh capital today, so more and more of the money invested today comes from the profits procured yesterday. This would seem to render redundant the violent accumulation practiced in earlier times. But 'accumulation by dispossession' continues to play a role in assembling the initial money power. Both legal as well asillegal means [...] are deployed. The legal means include privatization of what were once considered common property resources (like water and education) […].
>
> (Harvey 2010: 48-49)

Dispossession in Central and Eastern Europe mostly happened as a result of the privatization of state owned companies. As Kalb (forthcoming) notes in the case of Poland, the way workers construed privatization was different from the way liberal elites in Poland or people in the West construed it. For workers, it was supposed to be a transfer from the communist state which was seen as an external force into the hands of the workers themselves so that it could be cooperatively owned and managed. All social functions such as health care, holidays, and kindergartens were supposed to be retained. On the other hand, the juridical notion of privatization was different, so that workers needed to swim against the current of the ideas of liberal economists.

When shock therapy with full liberalization took place, the companies were pressed heavily to survive and the discussion about the legal form became less important. Intellectuals and media people began to picture themselves as cosmopolitan middle class as opposed to workers and peasants as Polish ethnic folk which were associated with alcoholism and laziness, whereas the unions were deemed dysfunctional for the new capitalist system. Internal orientalization accompanied and in a certain way deepened and smoothed the process of material dispossession.

Similar dismissal of the interests of workers and the lack of interest for their subalternization in quickly changing conditions of post-socialism can be noted elsewhere. Across the board, the access of the working class to resources is rapidly diminishing, industrial workers are near the bottom of the economic and social scale, no middle class is formed, and class boundaries are virtually impermeable. Thus Kideckel is correct to note that this part of the world is wrongly labeled as post-socialist when "it is better understood as 'neo-capitalist', a social system that reworks basic capitalist principles in new, even more inegalitarian ways than the Western model from which it derives" (2002: 115).

2.2.2. Degrees of fuzziness in post-socialist dispossession – capitalism, property, and meritocracy

Contra Kideckel, the widely held belief is that Central and Eastern Europe is not capitalist enough. One of the dominant metaphors – at first used ironically – for describing new property regimes is the notion of fuzziness which is always the case when "neoliberal property notions so often emphasize rights (entitlement) and obligations (accountability), whose subjects are normatively individuals (physical or jural) exercising exclusive rights" (Verdery 1999: 54) are not fully realized. Anthropological studies of property regimes in the socialist period emphasized that the Western notion of property did not fill a vacuum, but rather changed the way property was conceived in the former socialist countries in new and unexpected ways thus transforming liabilities, debts, and obligations alongside rights (Hann 2007, Verdery 2004).

Thus, the consequences of the changes have not been uniformly spread in the population. Old power structures often emerged influential and materially secured from the process. The hegemonic idea of property in the modern capitalist West, which has been exported to the post-socialist countries in 'transition', encompasses the liberal idea of civil society and equality before the state. However, in practice, property is far from guaranteed to small individual owners, rather, different mechanisms force small owners to waive their rights and allow previous managerial structures to become owners. Writing about the decollectivization process in Hungary, Martha Lampland states that "the combination of social ties, expert knowledge and extensive experience gave agrarian elites a disproportionate advantage in the transition" (2002: 47), but the same holds for managers in industry.

The changes in property relations were often described as theft, which Alexander views as the negative property relations, or more precisely a denial of relations expressing "first the gap between political promises and experienced exclusion and desolation, and secondly the leap between cognitive models of property relations of 'then' and 'now'. […] The relations of property

and theft here then spin around understandings of the relation of persons to the state" (2004: 270-271).

Even though illuminating at some points, Alexander overemphasizes the importance of social relations which obscures the very real process of material dispossession to which not all actors were subjected in a uniform way – a process that was obvious in changing "structures within which the person was suspended" (ibid. 254), but not limited to it. The discrepancy between the expected consequences of "transition" and the actual effects of reforms have been obvious for a long time. The previous stability, certainty, and order were lost, and new strategies of coping with the loss were developed. This brought about a reappraisal of the socialist past and the emergence of different interpretations. Pine and Bridger write: "As the present becomes more difficult, and expectations of the future increasingly bleak and uncertain, those affected by the reforms have shown an ever greater capacity for reinventing socialist past" (1998: 6).

2.2.3. Nostalgia and the lack of class mobilization

Rather than helping in the mobilization, nostalgic narratives served a pacifying role. Creed states that "the term nostalgia only resonates when two criteria have been met: when there is no chance of going back and when improvement is evident" (2010: 37). While the former is certainly the case, the latter need not be. Gille points out that "dismissing something as 'mere' nostalgia effectively depoliticizes the social concerns fueling nostalgia-like expressions" (2010: 287).

Nostalgia is just one of the avenues for reshaping subjectivities which point to class mobilization or the lack thereof. Mrozowicki and Hootegem state that "past dispositions are variously activated in relation to the encountered contexts of action, resources workers possess and their various kinds of reflexivity" (2008: 212). A combination of history of little or no union organization during socialism, and dispossession, informalization, and new flexible labor regimes, made labor unionism difficult in the post-socialist period.

Unions in Central and Eastern Europe got integrated into the global economy with initial

weak positions (Ost and Crowley 2001) so the combination of structural factors of peripheral capitalism which creates labor-intensive economies characterized by a hierarchical, authoritarian, and anti-union management styles, on the one hand, and trade union identities and strategies which are similar to the processes of decomposition of the 'working-class subject' which take place in the West (Mrozowicki and Hootegem 2008), on the other, the neoliberal processes hit workers in this part of the world especially hard. But beyond these large-scale processes, the agency of workers also shapes the outcomes through "the interplay between the objective circumstances of their actions and their reflexive life strategies" (ibid. 202).

In other words, what is necessary for union mobilization is responsiveness to subjectivities that are formed within broad economic processes. Uncovering how such subjectivities get shaped requires attention to the contradictions that characterize this process. For example, Dunn (2009) observes how the workers were subjected to various disciplining practices according to the place they supposedly assumed with regard to the previous system. In other words, "fragments of socialist experience are brought forward and inserted into a new context. The past and the present are in the present, but the past is so significantly changed by its location in the present that it becomes an integral part of it" (ibid: 146).

Workplace practices of disciplining are not the only practices through which subjectivity is reshaped. Consumption provides another important field where ideas about the self are negotiated. Talking about consumption in post-socialist settings often turns from the discussion about inequality into the discussion of values, consciousness, and choices (Rivkin-Fish 2009). Privatization and/or marketization of important services crystallized the issues of inequality and allowed the expression of class distinction. Class often figures as a subjective category of identification and a signifier of distinction. Those who perpetuate narratives of middle class often did not belong to it, but rather represent what Rivkin-Fish calls the aspiring middle class with guiding middle class values (ibid: 82). For them, there was a hope that capitalism and the inequality should return the society to a natural form of hierarchy.

2.3. Extensions

Studying railway workers' response to neoliberalization in post-socialism may require an extension of the existing theory. Serbian Railways is not a capitalist company operating in a market-system. It receives subsidies from the state and it has a monopoly on the railway transportation in Serbia. However, the pressures that it is subject to are making it respond to the circumstances of global capitalism. Proposed changes that are required for the EU accession are supposed to divide the company into three independent sections: infrastructure, passenger and cargo transport. The cargo section is supposed to start functioning according to the market principles in the near future. Further liberalization of railway transport is beginning to be implemented by allowing private operators to apply for licenses and set their own lines.

The state company is being downsized and the workers of the state company are already being leased to the private contractors in some cases. Thus, the processes described as neoliberalization which presuppose flexibility and reduction of workforce resulting in the fragmentation of the working class described by Carbonella and Kasmir (forthcoming) are already on the horizon. On the other hand, the position of the employees has been better than the position of most workers' in the private sector. Their salaries have been guaranteed and paid on time, their jobs secure unless they decide to retire before the retirement age.

What are the factors that shape the railway workers' quiescence in the face of deteriorating conditions of work and material conditions? The pending changes are not enough to describe and explain the lack of political mobilization of workers. What has to be taken into account to understand the workers' current position is their perception of the complex history of the state, the economy, and the railways. This perception is structured within the field of force which serves as a bridge between the level of the political economic analysis and the analysis of subjectification and governmentality. To understand how this field of force functions we must analyze the case cross-conjuncturally, starting from the macro level of the political economy which circumscribes the possibilities for contestation. In the next chapter, I will set the stage for discussing my interlocutors'

perception of their position by giving a historical account of the economic changes in Yugoslavia and Serbia from the 1980s onward.

3. Historical overview

Almost throughout the whole period of socialism, Yugoslavia had been included in the world system to a greater or lesser extent. It left the Soviet interest zone soon after the end of the Second World War, in 1948. The regime negotiated its external and internal success by relying to military and economic assistance from the U.S. and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, U.S. Export-Import Bank, and foreign banks, as well as the restoration of trade relations with the West (Woodward 1995: 25).

After 1949, its economic links with the West were gradually strengthening. The economy had been reformed to fulfill conditions for full membership in the GATT by 1965 and association agreements with the European Community and the EFTA were negotiated during the 1970s (ibid: 25-26). During the 1970s, the government achieved growth by importing advanced technology and primary commodities, and by offsetting the barriers against exports of some products to hard currency markets, both of which were financed with foreign loans (ibid: 47-48).

3.1. The global crises in the 1970s and the 1980s and their effects on Yugoslavia

However, the two oil crises in the 1970s made the interest rates for debt denominated in U.S. dollars rise to double digits, increasing the foreign debt (ibid: 48). 1979 saw the first austerity measures designed to decrease consumption and help the export sector, but these measures were insufficient to improve the trade balance. In the stagflation conditions which marked the world economy in the 1970s liberalization, privatization, welfare cuts, and layoffs were necessary conditions for access to loans from the IMF required for the countries economic revival (ibid: 48-49).

During this period, the remittances from the Western countries were also falling due to recession in the West (ibid: 49). The first big inflation happened in 1983 when prices for gasoline, heating fuel, food, and transportation rose by one third, and the inflation rate rose by 50% a year, and the Yugoslav government declared a deep recession (ibid: 50, 52). Over the next several years,

the problems kept piling: private sector was cut off from access to credit, savings were depleted to offset the higher prices and lower real wages, layoffs of workers took place and unemployment rose. This brought about major political problems and reforms, which failed in the long run. What ensued was "a breakdown in all elements of the domestic order, political disintegration, and rising nationalism" (ibid: 50) ultimately bringing about the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

3.2. 1990s: the dissolution of Yugoslavia; the sanctions and hyperinflation in Serbia

The need to reorganize the Serbian society arose in the 1990s after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Multi-party system, (relatively) free elections, and free enterprise were supposed to distance Milošević's government from its communist roots. The sanctions were imposed after the outbreak of war and they had a devastating effect on the already free falling Yugoslav economy without the desired effect of ousting Milošević (Delevic 1998).

> The GDP as well as GDP per capita show a similar decrease, as does industrial production, which fell continuously between 1987 and 2000. Consumption per capita went down [...], the total number of employed decreased and the ratio of number of employed per pensioner in the country went down, ratio of unemployment and number of unemployed increased (with official unemployment figures around 22 per cent in 1992 and just below 28 per cent in 1999). [...] In fact all macro-economic indicators show that the formal economy in Serbia in the 1990's was facing disaster. The only exceptions may be agricultural production and production of electricity.
>
> (Sörensen 2003: 60-61)

The inflation resulted in some highly creative strategies for redistribution within the "gray economy" such as hard currency trade for dinars with "dealers" as intermediaries between the state and banks on one side and general population on the other. The strategies such as manipulation with cashier's checks enabled the general population to survive the period of hyperinflation. Finally, the 1990s saw the rise in the "black economy", especially in the wartime circumstances. The outcome was positive only for the few that came out with the concentrated wealth due to these borderline legal or outright illegal strategies (ibid: 2003). This primitive accumulation was *de facto* legalized over time, initially by widening the space for private initiative so that there were around 60.000 successful enterprises during the Milošević's regime (ibid: 72).

One of the effects of sanctions was the search for solutions for internal capitalization in the absence of foreign capital. That is how, covered by the burgeoning nationalist practices and discourses (Ribić 2011), the first wave of property transformation in the post-Yugoslav Serbia took place (Lazic and Sekelj 1997). This form of property transformation did not bring about clear notions of ownership characteristic of the capitalist West, but it was a step in the direction of defining individual ownership first in the dominant form of internal shareholding. In conjunction with the primitive accumulation in the gray and the black economy but not limited to it, this process allowed the existing elites to benefit from their formal and informal ties with the robber barons or captains of the black and gray economy and create contingent outcomes of the social transformation in Serbia in which no clear trends, but rather "many opposing interests, possibilities and possible alliances, of which no stable negotiating position has yet materialised" (Sörensen 2003: 78).

3.3. The 2000s: liberalization, privatization

After the regime changed in 2000, privatization went into full force favoring external (often foreign) ownership. This model became dominant and it was questioned only in situations when the new owners did not abide to the obligations defined in the contracts. This wave of privatization was covered by the discourse of 'European values' which remains the hegemonic teleology until the present (Lazić and Vuletić 2009, cf. Lazić 2007). In the eve of the global economic crisis, the champions of the view that emphasizes the necessity of convergence of Serbia to the EU claimed that the "continuation of the reform process in Serbia is critical not only for the country itself, but also for the message such sustainability would send to its neighbours and to organizations such as the EU, the EBRD, the World Bank, and the WTO" (Bastian 2008).

The process of privatization is drawing to a close with only the biggest companies remaining state-owned. According to the statistics of the Privatization Agency, 1638 enterprises were privatized until September 1, 2011, and additional 537 enterprises were in the process of restructuring, or waiting to be privatized on that date (Privatization Agency 2012). However, most

of the latter are hardly going to have bigger impact on the privatization statistics since those were mainly companies that already went through unsuccessful privatizations. Privatization slowed down dramatically in 2009 and according to the Privatization Agency report only 79 companies were privatized that year, as opposed to the average number of around 250 privatizations per year between 2006 and 2008 (ibid 15).

In other words, a huge income supply for a peripheral country like Serbia was cut off. With the external and public debt piling up, new income sources had to be found. The global crisis, a more severe one than the 1980s crisis, made this extremely difficult. The possible solutions within the framework of global capitalism are for Serbia to become a source of cheap and increasingly flexible labor power in order to attract foreign direct investment or to sell the last few profitable companies that remain owned by the state. These processes are what railway workers can experience or anticipate. In the next chapter, I will explore how my interlocutors remember and narrate the circumstances of the past. In the chapter after next, I will recount the present circumstances and the expectations of the future.

4. Normalcy Lost

It was a good time
Everything bought on credit, all for the folks, my friend,
Pour some juice in the car
Then to Trieste for a pair of jeans.

It was a good time
Go on a picnic, go to the seaside
The house full of laughter
In the garden Yugo 45.

These are the lyrics from the song by a popular Bosnian band Zabranjeno Pušenje (The No Smoking Orchestra) quoted by one of my interlocutors when I asked about the socialist period. The song subtly refers to the common Yugonostalgic narrative: during the Yugoslav era, people were living well. The well-being was often described in terms of consumerism that could be engaged in within the country (e.g. the affordable car Yugo 45), but also outside the country (e.g. the Italian city of Trieste).

This song hints at some of the topics that came up in the discussions with my interlocutors when I asked them about the life in the socialist period. In this chapter, I will discuss their narratives of the past: first of the "Golden Age" of socialism exemplified in this song, and then the 1990s in which the socialist normalcy was lost. I will argue against the dominant interpretations of nostalgia viewing it as depoliticized for failing to understand the differential forms it takes which arise from different social locations within post-socialism. I will make a conceptual distinction between the aspiring middle class nostalgia and working class nostalgia, and view my interlocutors' narratives as the latter.

4.1. The Golden Age

4.1.1. Solidarity within the socialist "middle class"

In fact, the standard of living expressed in the narratives of consumerism in socialism remains the benchmark for comparison of the quality of life during socialism with periods after it. Narratives of consumerism in this case are centered on the possibility to afford commodities, but

also the affordability of the utilities and housing, as well as mobility. Sneki is an assistant station master for cargo transportation. When she was in high school in 1980s, her father had a workers' salary and her mother was unemployed, but she could still afford to live in Belgrade and save up some pocket money for herself. Also, her mother bought fine dresses and shoes for holidays for her and her sister. When she was getting married, her father financed a wedding for 400 people which lasted two days. Also, when she earned her first pay check, she bought her parents and her sister presents and treated her friends and herself, and she was still able to wait for the next pay check without asking for money which she could not imagine doing now.

In general, Railway workers felt that they had belonged to the middle class in the socialist period as they told me that income differences had been minor then. As Zoran put it: "We have never had, at least in our area, such big differences in the standard of living. […] In that period I told you about, there were eighty, ninety percent of people who belonged to the same class, whose life opportunities were approximately the same. There was always the ten, five to ten percent of those who [were very rich]." At which point Dragica interjected: "Now we don't have a middle class."

The idea of the middle class here is close to the sociological meaning of the term. This feeling of belonging to the middle class was engendered by the opportunity to engage in certain practices of consumption, but also by the possibility to move from rural to urban areas and to engage in cosmopolitan practices such as traveling revealing the connection between upward social mobility and geographical mobility within the project of socialist modernity. In the latter two, the Railways played an important role. Like in many other big companies of the time, it had an apartment fund where workers paid small involuntary donations so that the company could purchase or build apartments which were then given out to workers, according to a set of criteria. There were many ways that my interlocutors described for people to rig the process and obtain apartments on favorable conditions, for example by moving out of their parents' house and moving into rented apartments just several weeks before the commission would check it or getting a doctor

to sign that some family members are seriously ill.

4.1.2. Geographical and social mobility and the state

However, most of my interlocutors said that they had never wanted to apply for an apartment because they had their own property, especially those who had houses in the nearby villages. During the socialist period, the passenger transportation had been crucial for the region, since the developed industry in the region required a big number of workers, not all of whom could immediately migrate to the urban area. The railways also connected isolated mountain villages with urban centers, and for some of these villages railways still remains the only connection with cities and their best means of transportation, reductions, irregularities, and slow speed notwithstanding.

Passenger transportation was not limited to the region. Jovan, a retired railway worker, told me how he had used the railways when he had gone to Dubrovnik, where he had been on a holiday as a reward for participating in youth work actions. Zaječar was also directly connected to Belgrade during the socialist period. Using the Blue Ganz, as my interlocutors called this train, was their favorite way of traveling to Belgrade. This train was recently canceled, due to the dilapidation of parts of the railway network between these two cities so that nowadays people can go to Belgrade via Niš, a trip that takes twice as much time as the Blue Ganz did, and three times as much as the Zaječar-Belgrade bus.

The availability of the transportation directly hits the poorest citizens of this region, described as *socijala* by my interlocutors. They often offered examples of the world's best railways, such as German, French, or Japanese, none of which are profitable. Subsidizing this form of transportation is important in order to enable access to jobs, services, and goods and to prevent migration of people who live in remote areas.

The railways were thus seen as a state company that existed to "buy social peace" (*za kupovinu socijalnog mira*), directly influencing the standard of living by enabling geographical mobility, but also through employment. My interlocutors told me that those of them who were

educated in the specialized high school received a stipend for living expenses in Belgrade. For them, as well as for those who were not educated specifically for the railways, employment in the railways served as a channel for social mobility. Most of them had complex career paths that included multiple upward changes of jobs. The Railways provided its workers with the possibility to re-qualify for other jobs. For example, Jovan worked as a brakeman, a switchman, a shunter driver; then a freight conductor, a ticket cashier, a signalman; and finally even as a station master. Similarly, Nevenka started as a warehouse clerk, passed the differential exams and earned her B.A. while working, moving upwards in the company hierarchy until she became the section manager for cargo transportation for the Zaječar junction.

The cancellation of trains reflected the overall conditions of the Railways, which also, as several of my interlocutors pointed out, served as an index of the state's wellbeing. But the relationship between the state and the railways was more complex than that from the perspective of my interlocutors. The railways were also seen as subsumed to the state, so that the state was imagined as an agent that decides on the fate of the railways.[7] Even during the socialist period, the railways had not had top priority for the state. In the Zaječar region during the 1970s, steam machines had been phased out and old narrow gauge railways had been dismantled, significantly reducing the length of the railway network in this region. The decision was described as political by some of my interlocutors, a sign of the preference for the road transport. Along with unfinished projects to connect this region with Romania and Bulgaria, this proved to be an omen of the lack of investment in the decades to come.

4.2. 1990s

4.2.1. The deterioration of material circumstances

The workers felt the severe drop in the GDP in the beginning of the 1990s. A drop in salaries

7This fetishization of the state is opposed to a trend whose importance has been growing for the past decade, a trend of personalization of the functions of the state. I will return to this point later when I discuss the restructuring of the railway company, and deal with the view of the state as the agent that decides on the destiny of the railways and assigns importance to it.

due to inflation was the reason for the outbreak of the biggest strike of the railwaymen. The locomotive drivers founded the first independent labor union in 1993 and refused to work. They were the only ones within the company who refused to work, but it was enough for the entire company to be paralyzed for four days. Special police forces were set on the workers, and strike breakers were brought to replace the strikers. The locomotive drivers managed to get some concessions, which put them in a better position than other workers. According to my interlocutors, after crushing this strike, the management began segmenting the workers by enabling more labor unions to be formed and by co-opting the union leaders through the system of benefit, thus separating them from rank-and-file members.[8]

In the beginning of the 1990s, a further drop in industrial production gradually brought about less work for the cargo section and less workers traveling to and from work. As my interlocutors told me, there had been less trains running. For example, as Miroslav, who was a signalman at that time, told me:

> Back then, trains would run, wouldn't run, there were times when no trains would run for days, there was no fuel, there were no spare parts, there were no light bulbs, the trains would run with no light, with no heating, it was bad.

Vuk, a locomotive driver:

> I know that there was, for example, one trainset, and you sit, people come to the station, you sit, there are three directions, Negotin, Bor, and Niš. And then, literally, people would fight where the train would go, it was literally like that. Once they let you go to Niš, once to Bor, once to Negotin. Also because of the shifts, because of the people who were working on the railways... It was unbelievable, [the locomotive driver] would go to work, bring food for two or three days there, until he comes back.

People had relied more on the train transportation, since they could not afford to use their cars and the buses were more expensive. At the same time, the number of trains reduced so that the

8According to my interlocutors, the period of socialism had been characterized by more workers participation in management of the company. The workers councils had served as official channels for voicing discontent and solving problems. Most of my interlocutors who remembered this age claimed that they had been better represented in the socialist period. In that time, there was also only one labor union for workers in transportation and connections in Yugoslavia. The strategy of the company management since the 1990s was to reduce the importance of labor unions by employing the "divide and conquer" strategy. The history of the workers opposition to their deteriorating circumstances proves that the management had succeeded. After the semi-successful strike in 1993, there was one big attempt to organize a strike after 2000, but the economy that was almost completely ruined by that time so that the strike was not efficient even though it lasted for thirteen days. According to my interlocutors, the strikers had to sign loyalty to the company and after that, there were no more attempts to organize strikes. The struggle for workers' rights took the form of sporadic calls for the change of management and a bigger role for the labor unions in the "social dialogue".

crowds were enormous. For example, Dragica, who has been working as a cashier since 1981, told me how it had been during the inflation: “Terrible! We traveled in cargo wagons from here. [...] Wagons without light...” Or Sneki, who used the train to go to work: “I remember [...] when there were those crowds. […] when the train was so full, so that people were almost climbing the bumpers, they would climb to get... Where did those people go, I really [don't know].”

4.2.3. Alternative subsistence strategies and the emergence of widespread corruption

One possible answer is that, even when they did not work, people needed to engage in some activities to provide for subsistence. The most extreme element of the economic downfall was the hyperinflation which made people draw from their existing savings and supplies, or engage in alternative subsistence strategies, such as agriculture for those who had any property in the hinterland. This was not enough for many, due to the shortages of the necessities or the impossibility to obtain them, which forced people to fend for themselves in ways that would otherwise have been considered unethical. For example, some of my interlocutors described how they went across the Bulgarian border (approximately 20 km) to buy cigarettes, sugar, and candy for their kids.

The salaries at that time were approximately 5-10 DM, if exchanged immediately upon payment. To avoid further devaluation of the salaries, they would be spent immediately, but often they would be enough to afford only a bag of baking powder, a box of matches, or a hundred grams of coffee. In order to finance themselves and obtain goods, many of my interlocutors resorted to the practice of smuggling. Jovan described what he had done often:

> [Y]ou had to, there was no fuel. […] You go there with gasoline, and coming back, you put a bottle by the carburettor, a small tube so that you use gasoline as fuel, and in fact, I drove diesel oil in the reservoir, so that I can sell the diesel and earn some bucks to buy something, because you had to pay the utilities even though we were under sanctions, all of the charges (*dažbine*) had to be paid.

Even though they were involved in practices such as smuggling, my interlocutors usually did not consider themselves immoral. As opposed to them, according to Dragan, “there was scum and dereliction everywhere. […] Bedlam, that's how it was here as well.”

This enabled the more privileged ones to engage in shady businesses, creating what Dragan called "dirty pool" (*lov u mutnom*). For example, Jovan told me about a credit union that he was a member of: "it was ruined, no one knew who was the boss, who gave what, that's when certain bosses got rich in that way, and that's how the firm went under. A manager gets elected, and he's there as long as it's good for him, as soon as he's not, he takes the money, he goes away and he can't be found [...]".

The 1990s were the years when corruption emerged as a structural characteristic of the post-socialist transformation and most of my interlocutors saw this period as the time when the systemic corruptive behavior, that has been going on until today, had begun. However, the idiom they used to describe it was highly personalized so that those who do it are presented as managers[9] not prone to work and often prone to stealing, as opposed to the "regular people" who are hard-working. The view of the managers of that period is hard to discern from the view of the workers who did not work during the 90s, or the nouveau management.

4.3. Analysis

I agree with Frances Pine (2002) that nostalgia serves to criticize the present.[10] When pushed, my interlocutors could give examples of corruption or the pressures they were subjected to, but that was not the first thing they would talk about, rather, they would selectively emphasize the good sides of the socialist past. Svetlana Boym writes that "[r]eflective nostalgia is more concerned [...] with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. [...] The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time" (2001: 49).

9I use the word management to cover two meanings. My older interlocutors made a more or less explicit distinction between "*rukovodilac/rukovodioci*", a word with a Communist ring to it, which was usually used to refer to the old school cadres and "*šef/šefovi*", for anyone who is somewhat higher in the administrative hierarchy of the railways today. A subsection of managers are people that I will refer to as nouveau management, people who have become managers in the past decade.

10Although, not necessarily all aspects of the present. Berdahl writes that "[t]he various domains in which memory is produced, negotiated, and deployed can be where capitalist forms and practices are both contested and affirmed." (2010: 187)

There is a big difference in the way my interlocutors narrated about the socialist period and the period of the 1990s which point to a double break with the past, strengthening their belief that the return to the socialist period was impossible. The difference in these narratives points to the perception of the difference in the historical circumstances within which they had lived. I will label the narratives of the socialist period as nostalgia, even though my interlocutors never referred to them as such. These narratives were centered on the lost normalcy of socialism. As I have shown in the sections 4.1.1. and 4.1.2., the socialist normalcy was exemplified by the possibility to engage in practices of consumption, traveling, and social mobility.

Summarizing the conceptual contributions of the nostalgia studies in the post-socialist Eastern Europe, Poenaru (2013) identifies the contradictions between different conclusions. To overcome this conceptual impasse, Poenaru uses the term of disenchantment in order "to describe the critical commentaries workers in precarious conditions, suffering from the post-communist readjustments but also from the workings of the global neoliberal economy more generally, make in relation both to the present and to the communist past. Disenchantment is thus a more encompassing term that expresses a loss of hope, a dramatic frustration of expectations and aspirations, a sense of defeat" (ibid: 85). Rather than opting for a different term, I think the term nostalgia can serve the purpose here. However, the crucial point in dealing with nostalgia in post-socialism is understanding the source of its different expressions. I claim that the different articulations depend on the social positions of those who engage in the practice of nostalgic narrating and their material interests.

Rather than dismissing the internal contradictions inherent in different expressions of nostalgia and searching for different analytical terms to can capture its different expressions, it seems to me that it is useful to retain the descriptive label of nostalgia for all those different expressions and move the analytic work to the domain of political subjectivity which gets reshaped through the use of nostalgic narratives. For example, in the case of Russia, Michele Rivkin-Fish (2009) shows that certain nostalgic narratives can offer a way for the aspiring middle class subjects

to positions themselves in the context of emerging inequality of the market reforms. Despite the marginalization that they suffered in the new system, the value of the cultured intelligentsia remained an ideal so that the symbolic capital they could access would partially offset the dispossession they experienced in a market economy.

Unlike the case of Russia and the wish to return to the pre-Soviet normalcy, the nostalgic narratives in the post-Yugoslav space often posit the socialist experience as the experience of normalcy. However, I claim there is a difference between what the members of the (aspiring) middle class from what the members of the working class view as normalcy in socialism. The middle class nostalgia has been centered on the idea of Yugoslavia as a peacebuilding project that connected several ethnically distinct peoples in one country.

As Dubravka Ugrešić writes: "I grew up within an ideological framework […] of (false or real) brotherhood and unity (that was the most popular Yugo-ideologeme), which resulted in a common Yugoslav cultural space. […] I grew up in a multinational, multicultural and monoideological community that had a future" (1998: 4). During the 1990s, according to Ugrešić, the new nationalist governments confiscated the memory of Yugoslavia, erasing it and installing a new one (ibid: 228). The counternarrative of Yugonostalgia went against the official interpretations to reclaim the memory of Yugoslavia. This form of nostalgia was hailed by some as a "signal a normalisation of relations on an interpersonal and informal level" (Pauker 2006: 79).

As opposed to this form of nostalgia for the ideological layer of the Yugoslav experience (the shared cultural space, Tito, brotherhood and unity), I would claim that there is a form of nostalgia for the material aspects of life in socialism – what my interlocutors called the middle class standard of living. I do not want to claim that either of these nostalgic narratives are completely coherent and they uniformly correspond to the (aspiring) middle class and working class positions, since they represent an outcome of a rearrangement of classes after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The distinction is analytical and helps trace the changing positions and interests of post-Yugoslav subjects by positing two different foci of the discourse of normalcy: one cosmopolitan and centered

on good inter-ethnic relations and openness of Yugoslavia to the whole world (Simić 2009; Jansen 2009; Greenberg 2011), and the other on material wellbeing, wide availability of public services, quality of interpersonal relations, stability, and morality (Spasić 2012).

Ivana Spasić writes that this kind of nostalgia was less aimed at a particular historical moment and more at "the idea of the future, constant progress and improvement […] what is important is the contrast to the empty, depressing present which is almost universally interpreted as futureless" (ibid: 587). I would argue against the interpretation which emphasizes the wish for continuity because it does two problematic things. First, it depoliticizes the critique of the present condition by displacing the expression of their interests in the sphere of ideology. This is not to say that any articulation of interests can be free of ideology in its expression. However, any articulation can be further mystified if it is culturalized, if it refers to the ideology rather than the distance from the social reproduction of everyday life. Whereas this happens in the aspiring middle class nostalgia, I claim that it is not the case with the working class nostalgia. Although the loss of normalcy for some people in Serbia was expressed as "a loss of a particular understanding of agency, in which there is a correspondence between one's desires, the effects one's actions have in the world, and the ability to manage the reception of those actions by others" (Greenberg 2011: 89), this does not mean that they lost their agency altogether. Narrating nostalgic narratives is one practice which enabled my interlocutors to reposition themselves in the shifting historical circumstances and develop a specific form of subjectivity that is centered on adapting to those circumstances rather than changing them. This was an expression characteristic of perception of the power relations within which they were caught up and which they could not change, an expression of the experience of dispossession and disenfranchisement due to neoliberalization (for the the articulation of this experience in terms of right-wing populism cf. Kalb 2011).

In order to understand why this is so, I turn to my interlocutors' understanding of the 1990s, told alongside the nostalgic narratives of socialism. This period was seen as a time when socialist normalcy had been lost and when the drop in economic activity and wellbeing had been first

perceived. When talking about the socialist period, my interlocutors did not reference workers' self-management, but they talked about workers' councils as institutional paths for voicing discontent and solving problems and how they had been better represented in the socialist period, although the economic democracy was not exactly as it was presented in the theoretical works of Kardelj and others, self-management laws, and the official propaganda (Horvat et al. [eds.] 1975, cf. Unkovski-Korica 2014).

During the 1990s, there were institutional changes that canceled the socialist period arrangements – workers' councils were disbanded and powerful monolithic unions broken up. As Arandarenko writes: "the working class in the 1990s was divided and disorganized and [...] trade unions were weak and without any real influence. Workers have simply been unable to organize collectively or decisively for any serious purpose, regardless of their individual preferences" (2001: 160).

As I note in the section 4.2.1., the material conditions had rapidly deteriorated in this period and the inflation served a metonym for the whole decade. This was perceived as a rupture of the normalcy, what Marina Simić refers to as the narrative of the Fall from Grace, a certain return to pre-modernity (2009). All the specificities that the violent dissolution of the country brought notwithstanding, in many respects this period resembled other extreme post-socialist and post-soviet contexts where the usual idea of modernity as represented in the view of time as linear progress or the state as a neutral bureaucratic apparatus was brought into question (Simić forthcoming, cf. Humphrey 2002, Platz 2003, Rasanayagam 2011).

As shown in the section 4.2.2., many forms of corruption were normalized, but not all in the same way. As Humphrey writes about post-Soviet Russia, not all extralegal transactions were equally condemned and condemnable, rather, some were reprehensible (and considered such even by the practitioners), some morally good, and others ethically neutral because they were forced by circumstances (2002: 128, cf. Rasanayagam 2011). The new moral landscape that corresponded to the changed historical circumstances in which one had to find alternative subsistence strategies

(Bridger and Pine 1998) was perceived by my interlocutors as persisting until today, the hopes of new normalcy constantly frustrated.

Thus, we can see the narrative work that went into the explanation of the roots of the current situation in the loss of normalcy, and a profound reshuffling of the moral landscape. Viewing the nostalgic narratives of the Golden Age always in connection to the narratives of the 1990s reveals that they serve as the expression of the language of contention. In the next chapter, I will analyze the way my interlocutors thought about their present circumstances and future prospects to show how these narratives are a profound critique of the current situation from the position of workers, which cannot be changed for the lack opportunities to do so within the field of force.

5. The never-ending journey towards normalcy

I was having coffee with Dragica and Cica, two cashiers from the ticket sales department in a small room where they could smoke. We had talked for almost two hours covering most of the topics I was interested in. I was drawing the conversation to a close when Zoran, the assistant station master, came. Dragica was eager to talk to me about her life and her job, but she wanted to be backed up by other people so she immediately started explaining that I was doing a research and asking Zoran to join the conversation. Zoran sat down and said jokingly "If you're going to publish this in a newspaper, I can only say that we'd never lived as good as we have been since Vučić[11] came to power." Dragica told him that I was interested in the situation in the railways company today and how it had been during socialism. Zoran told me how he had lived much better during socialism and that he was sad because his children lived worse than he had lived. Even during the inflation and the wars, it had not been that bad. The standard of living had been much higher, although, often supported by smuggling, reliance on agricultural production in the countryside, or existing supplies and savings. The roots of the current situation can be traced to the 1990s, but Zoran claimed that the present situation was much worse:

> There's been great corruption in the past ten, fifteen, twenty years in this country, I'm telling you again. And everyone's stealing. Literally. Whoever can steal whatever, he steals it. [...] And it has been going on for a long time. It's taken root in heads. Now I'm in a post, I will take care of myself because my time is running out, in two or three years' time, four, I might not be here. It's in the consciousness of the people.

This short vignette opens up many themes that preoccupied my interlocutors during our conversations but also in their everyday lives. It shows an ironic detachment from the current situation, since the change people voted for (and capitalism which was referred to as immature capitalism) were worse than what they had had in the "Golden Age". This ironic detachment only went to a certain extent, since the current situation had material implications for the lives of people I talked to. That is why they had to position themselves with regard to the immediate situation and actors they consider responsible for it. In this chapter, I will focus on the present situation, having

11Aleksandar Vučić, president of the strongest political party in Serbia, currently serving as the prime minister.

largely to do with what Zoran called “the caliphate” under his breath, or what I refer to as nouveau management. Corruption and crime, and more generally the mentality and individual low morals, were usually used to describe why the company and the state were in such a bad condition. I will show that the moralistic idiom my interlocutors used was the answer to their dispossession and disenfranchisement in neoliberalization and the only critique they perceived as possible within the structured field of force.

5.1. Post-2000 restructuring of the company

5.1.1. Managers and regular people, workers and non-workers: employment and new trajectories of advancement

One of the major preoccupations of my interlocutors were people lacking work, usually the administrative personnel I refer to as the nouveau management. This was a situation that Zoran referred to as “the caliphate”. It was a subtle reference to the Iznogoud, the comic character whose sole purpose was to become the caliph instead of the caliph. In other words, the existence of nouveau managers was seen as completely pointless by many of my interlocutors.

The nouveau managers were the product of the multiplication of administrative personnel on the railways, which in turn was the effect of the restructuring of the railways that had been happened over the previous ten years in the direction of liberalization. The railway company was being segmented into sectors, with the final intention of separating them into autonomous companies, some of which are supposed to operate in the market. This meant that the posts that had existed within the uniform railway company were separated into three posts. The case of the administration in Belgrade, “the building in Nemanjina street”, was taken as the extreme example, where the number of workers in administration had risen from 13 in 1989 to around 500, according to Miroslav.

The employment of nouveau management took place for political reasons, whereas there was almost no employment of new workers. The company had been downsized from approximately

35,000 workers in the beginning of the restructuring to approximately 18,000 workers in the time of my research. All of my interlocutors claimed that there was a lack of blue collar workers, and this meant that some stations would get closed and some services curtailed, bringing about a drop in the quality of the services that the railways offered and in the overall safety. New employment had been forbidden except with the permission from the top management. In these circumstances, employment took place only sporadically, and it was usually the administrative personnel that got increased allowing the space for corruption and mismanagement. Those people usually had no workload, while the workload of the blue collar workers got increased. As Đorđe, a signalman who was leading several lawsuits against the company, told me: "The fish stinks from the head down, but it is cleaned from the tail. They are cleaning for the twentieth time from the tail, and the head is still there, and as long as it is that way, this will continue."

All of my interlocutors said that even in the cases when new blue collar workers got employed, it was through "political" connections. The employment that had taken place with the public calls for applications in the socialist period nowadays happened when a person could bring a "*rešenje*[12]". Unlike the time when the railways had employed people with little or no education and allowed them to gain it through the work process to advance in the company, nowadays people with qualifications got inserted in a specific place in the company, often within the higher rungs of the hierarchy. Thus most of my interlocutors did not show respect that had been given to managers (*rukovodioci*) who had climbed up the company ladder by gaining work experience in many posts before becoming managers. As Mihajlo, a cargo conductor who has less than two years until he can retire, told me "Higher education is necessary for employment, at least here on the railways. They want to have managers (*šefovi*), as many as possible, and no workers. […] These [...] managers (*menadžeri*) have destroyed us."

The word managers used here is different from the previous instances. It refers to the

12*Rešenje* is a word that my interlocutors use to describe a document that defines their job description and the salary that they receive, similar to work contract but without the connotation of free decision to enter such a relationship (even though they are not forced to accept it) since one is given a *rešenje* by someone higher in the administrative hierarchy.

specific qualification that many of the nouveau managers have, an equivalent of business administration. It is one of the fastest growing educational programs both within the state owned and private universities in Serbia. Even Zaječar, which is not a university center, has a privately-owned faculty of management. The problem of my interlocutors with such qualifications of nouveau managers is not that they were more educated, but that they were not educated properly. They described the nouveau managers as ignorant or incompetent since they were not educated through the work process itself. Dragica said "Rudeness, avoiding work, lack of organization. My section manager, he has to know that when I come to work, if I die, fall, he should sit and immediately continue the work. That is what I think a manager (*šef*) should be […]. Ours have no clue, no clue. […] I feel like they never sat on a train. When they send a telegram, it's immediately clear that they never sat behind a cashier's desk [...]." As they saw it, the problem is that the railways are a big system which has to be systematically planned for.

5.1.2. The ignorance of the nouveau management: mismanagement and corruption

Many of my interlocutors claimed that the participation in decision-making and collective bargaining that had existed in the socialist period did not exist anymore. The workers in unions that refused to be included in small political bargaining were seen as enemies, said Vuk, a labor union official in the locomotive drivers' union. Those who were opposed to the management were actively marginalized through policies that increased disorganization of the workers by creating incentives for new unions to appear and giving concessions to union leaders that separate them from rank-and-file members. For those who did not actively oppose the management there were two options. One was to be ignored since the ignorant nouveau management were too proud to ask someone for help and expertise. The other was to be left in work because they served the interests of the managers, or as Jovan put it, "the manager (*šef*) is the law now". That was why, for example, the post of the security manager in Zaječar could be filled by a colorblind person and the post of the manager for inside control by a person who has qualifications in management in health provision.

However, the misallocation of workers was seen as just one form of corruption that took place in the railways. Some of the practices of mismanagement had even started in the socialist period. For example, there had been a fee of 3% imposed on all financial transactions in the socialist period but all of my interlocutors who mentioned this also said that the railways had never received the money. Embezzlement of the funds designated for railways had continued in the 1990s. Dragan told me:

> Back in the day, [transportation institute] CIP was made and it would obtain the money for the Belgrade-Subotica road, they would get the whole amount, do just 12 km and spend all the money. The following year that same CIP would get the whole amount for the Belgrade-Subotica railroad and they would make another 12 km. […] And there has been no government (vlast) that hasn't taken a good amount from the railways.

The government here was not the state apparatus (Vlada), but people in charge of the company, the ministries, and other state bodies. Today, restructuring of the company allowed the managers to collude with people who had private business interest in the liberalization of the market. My interlocutors told me about many irregularities in the way the company was managed. Instead of making good business contracts with partners, the management was seen as trying to find ways to intentionally harm the company and benefit the associates in the private sector.

My interlocutors mentioned the business deal with the Fiat car manufacturer that the railways had lost some time before serves as a good example. Fiat had hired the private bidder since the price that the state-owned company offered had been artificially inflated. However, the private bidder had only had the locomotives, so that he the workers from the state-owned railways had been hired. In such a way, the private company got the qualified workforce with little or no investment and duties toward those workers simultaneously with the lucrative business arrangements.

What remained for the state-owned company were the less profitable and smaller deals on the peripheral lines. But even in those cases, there was space for corruption. For example, due to the sectional organization of the company, the trainsets need to change locomotives upon arrival in each new section. If the trainsets are held for a long time in certain junctions, the railways pays the penalties, or to be more precise, the price of the transport is reduced to harm the company. Some of

my interlocutors presented this as an intentional strategy of some managers who agreed on it beforehand and then got a bribe from the partner companies.

My interlocutors claimed that corruption and stealing are omnipresent, and the explanations they gave were at the same time highly personalized and psychologized. The latter usually took the form of explanation by referring to "the mentality of our people". There was no coherent narrative about the mentality: it is both a cause and a consequence, it is static or it can change. For example, Stefan compared the socialist countries in Europe with Cuba, North Korea, and China and explained the success of socialism in those countries with the mentality of those people, implying how the mentality was resilient. But some time later, he was comparing the mentality of people in the socialist Yugoslavia with today's mentality saying that things had changed dramatically: "now is a different time, a different mentality of people […]. Youth working actions were good for that time, even until recently, in my opinion. But they are not for this time."

5.2. Analysis

The distinction between workers and slackers today and the distinction between managers and regular people in the 1990s allowed my interlocutors to imagine themselves as moral subjects. Lacking the power the change their situation, my interlocutors adopted moralistic idioms to explain it. Wendy Brown's critique of moralism in the left-wing politics applies here as well. She asserts that moralism is apolitical: "it misleads about the nature oppressive forces, and about the scope of the project of transformation required by serious ambitions for justice. Such obfuscation is not the aim of the moralists but falls within that more general package of displaced effects" (2001: 37).

In other words, identifying the problem is political *per se*, but moralism depletes the political potential of the critique in this case. My interlocutors pointed out many problematic aspects of the way things functioned: employment without public calls for job applications, advancement without experience, theft, etc. This moralism might point to the existence of a moral economy, but identifying its characteristics would exceed the scope of this work. However, it is

important to emphasize the effect of such a critique, which is circumscribed within the field of force (Roseberry 1994). Writing about the contemporary moralization of politics in Britain, Clarke and Newman state that the "broken society" is presented as "the result of moral, rather than economic, conditions" (2012: 310). In other words, even though the metaphor of theft points to dispossession that was part and parcel of post-socialist neoliberalization, it is not perceived as a structural characteristic of capitalist market system in the periphery, but as a result of immoral behavior, as I have shown in the section 5.1.2.

This critique was aimed first and foremost at the politicians, the nouveau management, and labor union leaders – the people who benefited most from the changes that the state had undergone. Stanko, a ticket inspector, wanted to illustrate the Serbian situation by telling me to take the front pages of any newspaper and sum the amount that had been reported as stolen in headlines over the previous five years. If I did that, he told me, I probably wouldn't know how to express such a big number in words. He explicitly stated belief that if only the system had functioned properly and no one had been stealing, Serbia could have been as rich as Switzerland. Generalized from the material presented in the section 5.1.1., there were three ways of expressing this critique.

First, the blame could be placed on the state that was viewed as not present enough to do what it was supposed to do or that was viewed as outright criminal. Both versions are elements of a wish for a functional state, or what Jansen (2014) calls gridding. Jansen uses this term to capture "the intimate ways in which efforts to restore routines of 'normal life' were implicated in the production and functioning of ordering frameworks" (ibid. 243). In other words, what is often encountered in the Balkans is the wish for proper state presence in order for lives to be considered normal (cf. Brković 2014, Greenberg 2011, Simić forthcoming).

On the other hand, the blame could be placed on people who are immoral. For example, what Stanko said about stealing was also expressed more or less implicitly by my other interlocutors. However, they also identified was in the fact that the ticket inspectors were the ones who stole, too. Stanko, on the other hand, did not even address this widespread belief about his

profession. I claim that this points to the complexity of the wish of my interlocutors to consider themselves as moral subjects, despite the practices that they were or had been engaged in such as smuggling during the 1990s, or embezzlement. The blame was always placed on other people and this helped my interlocutors to position themselves within the shifting moral coordinates. In other words, when talking about their own behavior, my interlocutors always emphasized that they had been forced by the circumstances – for example, there had been no fuel, so you had to smuggle it from Bulgaria (cf. Rasanayagam 2011).

Finally, the blame could be placed on "our mentality". For example, they would say that the people's grasp of capitalism was insufficient in Serbia, and that people could not do anything without a whip, since they had picked up the habit of not working in the 1990s. It was difficult to separate these three forms of the critique when they are expressed. For example, the idea of the absence of the state always implied that it was the officials who were stealing or neglectful. Similarly, the idea of the mentality of the people was generalized from the perception of the behavior of multiple individuals who were stealing.

In other words, in some of these cases the common liberal elite criticism of the "regular people" got inverted. The discourse of the lazy, sloppy, and thieving workers which were the reason for the lack of success in post-socialism, was rearticulated so that it was the managers, the politicians, and the labor union officials who were ultimately the ones to blame. In such a way, "the common material and meaningful framework [which] is, in part, discursive: a common language or way of talking about social relationships that sets out the central terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur" (Roseberry 1994: 363) was appropriated by my interlocutors to critique the ones in power, pointing to the breakdown in hegemony.

Of course, placing the blame the ticket inspectors or the mentality points out the width of the points of rupture: a contestation did occur but it was limited, and some of my interlocutors had been voicing their consent by reproducing the meaningful framework at hand. Here we can see that "immature capitalism" could go hand in hand with an individualistic ethos and hopes that things

might be better if everyone behaved as they were supposed to in capitalism (for a discussion of hopes among entrepreneurs in this region see Erdei 2009). When asked about changes that can be expected as part and parcel of the process of restructuring such as a new organization of work, a re-qualification of workers, or a relocation of workers to different cities, they emphasized their own adaptability, as opposed to the slackers who would avoid changes at all cost. Goran, a young locomotive driver, told me: "[I]f our health good and if you're capable of it. That's first. And second, of course, to be motivated by money. […] That's life, I would try something else, [I] wouldn't sit and wait. Struggle for life. What could I do?" Some of them, like Goran in this quote, even expressed hope that the situation would be better if a good owner came and demanded a better work ethic.

What are the consequences of such beliefs for the political subjectivity of my interlocutors?As I said in the previous chapter, nostalgic narratives about the socialist period as well as narratives of the Fall from Grace (Simić 2009) during the 1990s are not free floating stories, but rather they are always told against the backdrop of the present conditions and expectations of the future. Nostalgia was first described as "the disease of an afflicted imagination, [which] incapacitated the body" (Boym 2001: 4). Since then, the meaning of the term had changed a lot, but it is still considered incapacitating, at least in the sense of the impossibility of adjusting to the new circumstances.

Contrary to this, I claim that nostalgia is productive: the nostalgic narration of my interlocutors is used as a technique of the self to create "the capitalist man" – an adaptive subject. Here, I follow Gibson-Graham who build on Foucault's notion of the ethical practices: "The co-implicated processes of changing the self/thinking/world is what we identify as an ethical practice. [...] Through self-awareness and transforming practices of the self that gradually become modes of subjectivation, the ethical subject is brought into being (Foucault 1982: 28). [We] recogniz[e] as 'technologies of the self' the cultivation of certain kinds and capacities of thought" (2006: xxviii).

The subject created through these practices was the man of what my interlocutors called the

immature capitalism. That was precisely how the historical circumstances have been presenting themselves to my interlocutors for more than two decades of structural corruption, perceived as theft, or in other words, active dispossession. Those who profited in the process were the ones who did not work in their well-paid positions, the positions which they got only because they had references to prove that they had graduated overnight from shady schools. Everything they had been taught in socialism or about it proved wrong: the channels for voicing discontent and for advancement were closed to them, the unions were incapable of struggling to improve the conditions (cf. Narotzky forthcoming).

In other words, the institutions of the socialist state had been dissolving, the institutions of neoliberal governmentality (cf. Fraser 2003, Ferguson and Gupta 2002) had started emerging, but they had not encroached the field completely, and their mixture sketched the contingent outcomes of the post-socialist neoliberalization in Serbia. In the interstices that opened up, my interlocutors had to employ techniques of the self and reshape their subjectivity. Fraser writes about post-fordist mode of subjectification which assumes that the "individual is obligated to enhance her quality of life through her own decisions" (2003: 168). However, the calculation that enables the existence of such subjectivity cannot take place due to uncertainty and structural corruption. One is not responsible for managing risk, rather one is responsible to adapt after the fact. This does not mean that my interlocutors considered themselves futureless. Rather, the future they anticipated was radically open, and highly volatile. Even though they might have the idea that they lack the agency (cf. Greenberg 2011), in fact the very expression of this critique and the daily work to adapt to the circumstances can be seen as a display of agency within the field of force.

In turn, one might make a moralistic claim about the lack of political mobilization of the workers. If the last successful big strike was organized in 1993, and the last unsuccessful one in 2003, what were the workers doing the rest of the time? Why didn't they fight for their rights if no one was laid off because of the participation in a strike? Such questions would ignore the labor union policy of the company which led to their proliferation right after the first successful strike and

internal hierarchies and splits among the workers where particular demands often take precedence. Since the first strike, the labor union officials were given benefits in order to get their consent for the decisions of the management and the most militant group, the locomotive drivers, were given some concessions. This institutional arrangement in conjunction with the widespread idea that the Railways was a big company where a systematic action was needed in everything, including union actions. In other words, the field of force structured the perception of the possibility, or rather the impossibility, of active opposition against the hegemonic order.

In line with this, there were no clear expectations from the future. Even Goran, one of the rare interlocutors who expressed hope that proper capitalism might set things right, was explaining me how he considered himself just a worker who did not know too much, someone who would put his head and do the job. However, he asked a rhetorical question towards the end of our conversation, the question that he had sometimes discussed with his colleagues: "What if we always just bend our head and never complain?"

6. Conclusion

One of the first things I did when I came to Zaječar for my fieldwork was to go see the station. In front of the waiting room, there was a commemorative plaque with a relief of four railway workers with their hands held high in the air and the following inscription: "On the 21st January, 1920, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, here began the strike of the Timok region railway workers which was the introduction to the general strike of the railway workers of Yugoslavia." This event was commemorated 45 years later, in 1965. That was in the socialist Yugoslavia, the period when the Railway Workers' Day was celebrated in April.

My fieldwork also took place in April, but only one of my interlocutors mentioned that this day had been celebrated and another mentioned the plaque. Neither of them, however, connected it to their present day circumstances. What happened to the militancy of railway workers? Why did the memory of militancy fade even though a memento is still there?

My method resembles what Burawoy (1998) calls the reconstruction of theory – although I have not been strict in following it – in order to understand the dynamics that disabled my interlocutors from articulating a political opposition to their deteriorating conditions. I started with the existing theory on neoliberalization, and more specifically, dispossession in post-socialism. I connected it with a reading of the history of Yugoslavia and Serbia which recounted the way Yugoslavia had been pulled into the vortex of global capital flows and what consequences the global economic crises had had on Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a part of the changing world system, first in terms of its Cold War positioning and linkages, and then as affected by the changing macro-economic climate. The internal organization and the following dissolution were profoundly shaped by the economic factors, which were then expressed and negotiated in contingent state- and nation-building political projects and everyday ideologies. Furthermore, the dissolution brought about a proliferation of practices for primitive accumulation, some legal, some less so, others illegal altogether. The 1990s saw the beginning of the process of large-scale property transformation, which went on in full force in the 2000s. However, coming closer to the EU did not bring about the

desired effects, but rather the lack of "transparency" remained one of the defining characteristics of the Serbian version of post-socialism.

How can we understand the impacts of such circumstances on "regular people", as my informants called themselves? I turned my gaze towards the workers of the state-owned railway company in order to examine a specific ethnographic context characterized by a lack of political mobilization against neoliberalization and circumstances were structurally conducive to the rearranging of the moral landscape and repositioning of subjects. Surrounded by the omnipresent dispossession presented as theft, proliferation of unions due to the company policies, and nouveau management and union leaders whose advancement was a result of establishing new trajectories for advancement and new hierarchies, my interlocutors' work on providing and ensuring subsistence was coupled with the practices that enabled them to reposition themselves as moral actors and adaptive subjects.

One of the practices of the self (Foucault 1982, Gibson-Graham 2006) – arguably the most important one – was narrating about the past, both in the form of nostalgic narratives and the narratives of the Fall from Grace (Simić 2009). In order to see this, we need to take into account the specific perception of the structural changes. As Narotzky writes, "people experience these commonalities in a particular and fragmented way, from within a structure of feeling embedded in place and personal hardship" (forthcoming).

The way my interlocutors perceived the changes was structured within the field of forces (Roseberry 1994) which left them devoid of channels for voicing discontent or institutional mechanisms for articulating dissent in a politically significant way. Adaptive subjectivity was a tacit model of the capitalist man to strive towards and achieve through the practice of narrating through the past. The combination of the existing theories about dispossession in post-socialist contexts with theories of subjectivity and governmentality via the notion of the field of forces proved useful in this sense. It allowed me to understand why people rarely hope for a proper capitalism that would set things right as well as why the idea of the volatility of the future that can only be adapted to is

dominant. The former represents a partial acceptance of the hegemonic discourse (the hope for a proper capitalism implies that what is in place now is at best a deviant form of capitalism) whereas the latter is an outright rejection of the hegemonic discourse ("abandon all hope..."). Both of these ideas exemplify an outcome of an implicit top-down project of neoliberalization with the common discursive framework of future possibilities that sometimes gets partially accepted but often breaks down revealing "the fragility of a particular order of domination" (Roseberry 1994: 363) but also its structural and tactical power which circumscribes the field of opposition to include only the discursive critique and exclude more dangerous political articulation.

Understanding this might help find ways of inspiring optimism through fostering different subjectivities, maybe based on the same nostalgic narratives of the socialist Golden Age. So far, I could hardly encounter this form of uncertain optimism often. Rather, what I heard from my interlocutors almost as a rule can be summed up by what Stanko told me: "It's like the nature where when you are the slowest one – they catch you and eat you. But if you're fast enough and start running on time, you may even manage to escape".

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