

The Politics of Informality: External State-building in Post-Dayton Bosnia

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Declaration

I hereby declare that no parts of this thesis have been accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. This thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnography of informality in the context of institution-led state-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on thirteen months of participant observation in three research sites, it argues that the boundary between the formal and the informal is fuzzy, and is dependent on the meaning-making actors' positionality, power and performativity. As an interdisciplinary project at the crossroads of political science and social anthropology, this dissertation proposes a grounded theory in which informality functions as a communicative vehicle in the process of policy translation among local and non-local actors.

Informality has been associated with reproduction 'from below' – seen as residual to formalizing initiatives of state – and as an exclusive product of local actors. My research goes counter to these claims in that it sees the two domains as interrelated and a product of interaction between local and international actors. To the landscape of phenomena attached to the qualifier 'informal', including informal practices, institutions, networks, and informal governance, I add the concept of 'informal prism'. Challenging the assumptions in earlier informality studies, the concept of informality as a prism moves beyond the binary of formal/informal, the static normative labeling of informality as inherently a less desirable domain of human activity, and finally the normative residualism implicit in most studies on the subject of informality. Bringing on board the anthropological literature, the research contrasts the experience-distant concepts related to informality (such as corruption, networking, social capital, and clientelism) with the emic terms used in Bosnia: *štela* (local colloquial term for 'connections' and their use), *ko fol* (litt. 'as if') and *ubleha* (litt. 'bluff').

The dissertation traces informality locally, within an international agency, and in interaction between the international agency and its local counterparts. The main research site is the OSCE, where I explore the relationship between informality and internationality as a practice. The second site is formed by the local counterparts of the OSCE, namely 'local communities' (MZs, *mjesne zajednice*), semi-formal organizations that originated as a neighborhood-level governance in socialist Yugoslavia. In interaction between the OSCE and the MZs, I analyze the informal prism through the process of *translating down*, in which the local intermediaries interpret the etic language of informality into those emic concepts that the 'internationals' oppose. The third site is a network of NGOs united in an anti-corruption movement ACCOUNT. Here I observe the complementary process of *translating up* of informality through a series of performances of the local actors aimed at the international audience.

The theoretical implications of this research reach over four broad areas of investigation: (1) theories of informality in social sciences; (2) critical state-building literature; (3) interpretive policy analysis and critical policy studies; and (4) area studies on the Balkans and Bosnia. While the primary goal of my research has not been policy-driven, and has been more concerned with challenging taken-for-granted normative ideas rather than creating new ones, there is a set of lessons learnt that address the policy-making world. These can be grouped into: (1) informality management within an international bureaucratic apparatus deployed in a contact zone; and (2) informality management on the local ground.

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Introduction

On a spring day in 2010, I was sitting on a sunny terrace of an international development agency in Sarajevo, having a coffee with two co-workers of mine, an Australian and a Bosnian. At the time, I was an 'in-between international', i.e. a foreigner who was fluent in the local language and was spending a large part of her free time with Bosnian friends. I was also a teacher, a proud member of a local hiking association and a somewhat ashamed member of a top-end wellness studio that catered to the 'internationals.' By then, I had had countless conversations with my Bosnian friends about the difficulties of life in a post-war country, the intricacies of finding employment, arranging appropriate medical treatment for their parents and relatives, and organizing just about any bureaucratic procedure in the country. I had also lent an ear to their complaints about the ever-lasting presence of the foreigners, their privileged social status and the ambiguous role they played in cementing a Bosnian version of a liberal democratic state.

To my friends, it was both discomfoting and 'God-given' that everything in the country had to be arranged through *štela* (a Bosnian colloquial expression for social connections and their usage). To them, however, the 'internationals', despite the discourse of transparency, professionalism and democratization they were supposed to bring to the country, were no exception to this rule. The international agency I was working with had, by then, published an extensive research report on social capital, in which the authors intended to deal with contemporary Bosnian sociality: what kinds of ties were important for Bosnians and for which reason. *Štela* was taken on board as a result of intervention of local employees of the agency. Its incorporation, however, caused a significant challenge to the team, struggling to fit the local concept into the existing normative framework. It did not seem to be 'benign', as the adopted discourse of Putnamian social capital

would have it; it was also not just purely 'bad', in order to be dismissed as a local version of corruption. Eventually, it made its way into the report as a makeshift example of 'negative social capital.'

On that spring day on the terrace, after the said report was released, I was talking about these intricacies with my two colleagues. Was *štela* really something essentially Bosnian? Was it a 'thing' or a transcendental way of relating to each other? While the Bosnian colleague sarcastically remarked on its being one of the prime items of Bosnian export, together with the pyramids, *ćevapi* and *rakija*, the Australian shrugged her shoulders and said she did not see much of a difference between how things got done here and in Denmark, her second homeland. According to her, it was just a matter of scope, or extent to which these practices were framed and acknowledged. "Why don't you turn this into your PhD proposal?", she said eventually. This led to five years of research and writing on (in)formality, *štela* and state-building, the results of which are presented here.

Studying Mature Dayton Bosnia

The rooftop conversation among foreign and local staff members of an international development organization happened fifteen years after the end of the 1992-1995 armed conflict in Bosnia. During those fifteen years, power structures in Bosnia were frozen with minimal changes to their design and competencies. This had sharply contrasted with the beginning of the decade when the country embarked on a series of radical turmoils that impacted its borders, sovereignty, inner administrative divisions, and last but not least the reconstitution of nationalities living in the territory. Still in 1991, Bosnia was one of the federal republics composing Yugoslavia. The secession of the Yugoslav federation brought bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and continuous constitutional changes by the warring parties. The final settlement of the Dayton Peace Agreement

in 1995 (hereafter abbreviated as Dayton) was introduced by external state-builders as a complex and highly decentralized constitutional design which gave Bosnia some form of statehood. The ultimate sovereignty, embodied in the office of the High Representative, however, rested with the international community.

Dayton divided Bosnia into two entities – The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine*, FBiH) and the Republic of Srpska (*Republika Srpska*, RS) – plus a separate district Brčko. The municipality of Brčko was originally not included in Dayton,¹ due to its strategic location (it divides the RS into two parts) and was included to create a multi-ethnic area. In contrast to this, the two entities were created according to the 'ethnic key' prerogative, with the aim of accommodating the claims of the (Bosnian) Serbs for autonomy and reconciling those of the (Bosnian) Croats and the Muslims co-habiting in the FBiH. The lack of ability to create three separate entities for three ethnicities² led to the creation of an additional level of governance in the FBiH – cantonal – that is missing in the RS. Thus, the two entities composing Bosnia are asymmetrical in terms of their ethnic compositions and levels of governance.³ On the plus side, Dayton managed to keep Bosnia in a state of *de facto* peace, while on the down side, Bosnian society remained divided on many basic issues – beginning with the very legitimacy of the imposed state (Bose 2002: 3), its formal institutions and borders. Even though no census data has been

¹ For more on the strategic influence of Brčko and the international experiment in creating its multi-ethnic design, see Jeffrey (2006).

² While the majority Serbian population was 'successfully' isolated during the war, the Croats and Muslims in many parts of Central Bosnia and Herzegovina remained organized in ethnic patchworks, with only parts of bigger settlements, such as Mostar or Stolac, ethnically separated.

³ The varying levels of governance have in popular thinking been correlated with the growth of informal institutions – as has bluntly been put by one of the prominent figures of Bosnian social and political life, former general Jovan Divjak: “the basic difference between the two entities of Bosnia is the fact that there are three levels of corruption in the Federation [municipalities, cantons and the Federal authorities], there are ‘only’ two in the Republika Srpska [no cantons]“ (Divjak in Chandler 2006a).

available since the breakup of the federation, survey data revealed that more than 68% percent of the country's inhabitants did not associate themselves with the country.⁴

While the official goal of keeping the presence of the international community had been the gradual handover of sovereignty to the local hands,⁵ after nearly two decades of intervention, there was little sign of transfer of competencies towards a fully accountable local government (ICG 2011). In European context, this made the international intervention in Bosnia unprecedented in terms of scope and length. The politics conducted in the name of external state-building, e.g. those of ‘good governance,’ ‘capacity-building,’ ‘empowerment,’ and ‘partnership’ did not resolve the problems that made Bosnia the epitome for a weak state (Dzihic & Hamilton, 2012), ‘phantom state’ (Chandler 2006a) and a ‘quasi-protectorate’ (Bose 2002; ICG 2009, 2011). Paradoxically, this made Bosnia not only an excellent laboratory for the study of external intervention into domestic affairs, but also an ideal case for the study of societal dynamics and transfer of cultural habits and practices in a European periphery.

Jansen, Brković and Čelebičić (2016) frame the current spatiotemporal situation as Mature Dayton Bosnia. In this context, studying Mature Dayton Bosnia means refraining from implying immaturity and "childhood maladies for which it is entirely unaccountable and that justify continued guardianship as a matter of principle" (p. 3). Instead, they propose a series of chronotopes, used in the Bakhtinian sense as communicable images of the 'when' and the 'where' in which lives unfold. In this manner, Bosnia is at the same time a *roundtable for negotiations*, a

⁴ Calling oneself Bosnian-Herzegovinian was found to be the least popular national identity among available ones (UNDP 2009).

⁵ The two designs of the final solution for Bosnia have ranged between gradual ‘reintegration’ and ‘definitive partition’ and reflect the two competing views scholars and the international community held on the 1992-1995 conflict: i.e. whether state-building should be seen as a restoration of multiethnic Bosnia or the war revealed underlying hostilities that prevent a single institutional framework from being ever fully functional (Chandler 1999, Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings 2006: 12).

semi-peripheral *swamp*, a *waiting room* and a *labyrinth*. Most of these chronotopes are pervaded by a sense of "temporal entrapment" which operates on two levels. On a geopolitical level, it is the portrayal of Bosnia associated with its lack of progress; on the level of an everyday lived reality, it reflects the chronic feeling of being stuck (p. 16). For the purposes of this research, Mature Dayton Bosnia also implies an environment that is no longer strictly defined by its recent post-war past. At the same time, however, it is living in the present in which Bosnians as well as foreigners shape its contemporary sociality.

In this manner, Mature Dayton Bosnia has provided an exceptionally suitable ground for the present research project. From the perspective of studying informality, its limited statehood and large international presence enabled the investigation of dynamics that are not merely culturally based, but are shared and negotiated in between Bosnians and those from the West. Related to this point is also the ability to explore the stated link between informality and postsocialism.⁶ Many studies of informality have associated this phenomenon with one of the post-socialist legacies. Exploring informality in Mature Dayton Bosnia enables us to go beyond this assumption while looking at the interactions of people who were not only of Bosnian (post-war, post-socialist, backward) origin but came for work from the developed countries of the EU and Northern America. Thus, studying informality in such a context is an attempt to go beyond orientalizing notions and culturalist claims present in the informality literature.

⁶ Within the first post-Dayton decade, Bosnia was framed as a "post-war" country, while few authors explored its 'missed' postsocialist legacy (see Gilbert, 2006; Gilbert, Greenberg, Helms and Jansen, 2008).

Informality, performativity and cultural intimacy

The primary concern of the present study is the way people perceive and label 'informal' behavior, i.e. such conduct that evades formal regulations without necessarily being in conflict with them. The concept of 'informality' refers to that large area of human behavior which is unregulated by written conventions. In social sciences, notably in political science, this large arena of human behavior came to be defined by the reference to its opposite: the formal, the textual, the written, the encoded (Christiansen & Neuhold, 2012; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, 2006; North, 1990). The informal has been connoted with the undesirable, residual, shady and the study of informality has been carried out primarily among post-socialist or third world countries (Ledeneva, 1998, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Morris & Polese, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Polese, 2008; Rivkin-Fish, 2005; Tsai, 2007). This research goes beyond these assumptions and investigates whether the formal and the informal really are two discrete realms as many have presumed. Do people resort to informal behavior, connections, practices only when the formal channels are dysfunctional? Is the 'informal' inherently shady, malign and undesirable? In response to these questions, an ethnographic study nested in three research sites in Bosnia offers a grounded theory of informality bringing into consideration questions of power, privilege and normative positioning.

Through studying informality from an interpretive perspective, the dramaturgical angle to studying human interaction brought for the related concept of performativity. Here it is used not in the Butlerian sense, but as per Goffman's definition of performances (Goffman, 1986, 1990). Performativity intersects with informality in that it traces the areas in which human behavior towards institutions tends to be faked, leading to the emergence of Potemkin institutions (Allina-Pisano, 2008). Through the prism of performativity, we can trace the emergence of norms and regulations that from the start mask a reality that is deeply different from what they pretend: that

most interactions, processes and bureaucratic practices have a human side, one that is subject to human interactions, feelings and emotions. And that often rules and procedures emerge just to cover up this reality. The concept of performativity enters the subject of informality there where it intends to decide whether social relations can be studied from a dramaturgical perspective.

Herzfeld (2005) in his seminal account on *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* speaks of external embarrassment that accompanies certain aspects of a 'cultural identity,' i.e. those practices and behavior that on the outside, or by new-comers to the culture, can be considered as ridiculous at best and outright unfair or shady at worst. These traits, as Herzfeld argues, however, provide an inner 'glue,' a reassurance of common sociality for those who know how to navigate these quirks and particularities. He further argues that formal operations of national states depend on coexistence with various realizations of these aspects of cultural intimacy (2005: 7). State, in his conceptualization, is nothing more than a shifting complex of people and roles, and thus inherently unable to adhere strictly to its superordinate rules. This research intersects with notions of statehood and cultural intimacy in that it expands some of its premises to the newcomers, in this case the 'internationals' working in Bosnia: seeing 'internationality' as a category of practice rather than a solid identity of its own. In this way, related concept of *disemia*, i.e. "the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection," (p. 14) helps unpack the interpretive filters employed in coding, decoding and normative labeling of practices and perceptions of informality.

Conceptually, this thesis stands at the crossroads of political science and social anthropology. As such, it relies on the tension between the foreign, etic terms mentioned above, and the very local, emic terms that Bosnian participants of the research were using. Apart from *štela*, the other two key concepts of this thesis are *ko fol* (loosely translated to English as 'as if') and *ubleha* (loosely

translated as 'nonsense'). All of these terms lack a precise equivalent in English. They problematize the experience-distant concepts of performativity and cultural intimacy and help us understand the perspectives of Bosnians, the locals, recipients of democratization and state-building assistance. Both *ko fol* and *ubleha* are a part of the interpretive filter of informality that expands our previous understandings of the relationship between the formal and the informal.

Through the ethnographic material (chapters 4, 5) I show the simultaneous processes of *translating down* and *translating up*⁷ carried out by local employees of an international agency as a part of their interpretive labor (Graeber 2012). The *translating down* process bridges the Herzfeldian *disemia* in that the 'local' employees transfer the meanings of the international agency into the conceptual universe of the Bosnian project counterparts. In the second process, *translating up*, the task of these interpretive laborers is to communicate their needs, demands and activities in order to make them understood at the international donor level. These processes lead to the emergence of performative mechanisms and fake institutions, and hamper communication, project formulation and implementation in external state-building.

Towards the politics of informality

Informality is an object of research that has been associated with ethnographic studies of reproduction 'from below' – in that it is seen as residual to formalizing initiatives of state – and institution building and as an exclusive product of local actors. My research goes counter to these propositions. Its novelty lies in investigating simultaneously the meanings attached to informality by locals as well as non-locals and its role in both bottom-up and top-down communication of the

⁷ These concepts are devised in parallel to the ethnographic studying up, i.e. research on elite groups and power holders in a society, and studying down, i.e. engaging with the powerless, the oppressed and the marginalized.

state-building policies. Within the field of political and policy studies, it is the first interpretive engagement with the subject of informality that addresses the central research question of this project: *How is the boundary between the formal and informal negotiated and navigated by local and non-local actors involved in the state-building process?*

The main theoretical argument proposed in this thesis is that the 'formal' and the 'informal' are intertwined through the interpretive filter of politics, positionality and power. Thus, the boundary between these two realms is blurred and subject to actors' meaning-making processes. In order to understand these discrepancies, I use the concept of informality as an interpretive prism. In the context of the ontological and normative assumptions of mainstream informality studies (see further chapter 1), the concept moves beyond the ontological binary of formal/informal, the static normative labeling of 'informality' as inherently a less desirable domain of human activity, and finally the normative residualism implicit in most studies on the subject of informality (Christiansen & Neuhold, 2012; Christiansen & Piattoni, 2004; Helmke & Levitsky, 2006; Lauth, 2012; Reh, 2012). While most of these assumptions are anchored in epistemological positivism used widely in political science and policy studies, parts of the dichotomist discourse of formal/informal have been embraced by methodologically more diverse disciplines of sociology and social anthropology. This study, standing at the disciplinary crossroads of political science and social anthropology, reexamines the theory of informality with insights from extensive ethnographic fieldwork. In an iterative process of interpretive research, the concept of informality has been articulated while thinking back and forth between findings on the ground and the existing theories that relate to them. It is a concept of fluid ontological boundaries that are not predetermined, but are negotiated back stage, behind the scenes, in a juxtaposition between performances oriented to those holding power and those seemingly powerless and unimportant.

Furthermore, to the landscape of phenomena attached to the qualifier 'informal', including informal practices, institutions, networks, and most recently, informal governance, I add the concept of informal prism. This concept overcomes the limitations of previous theorizing in that it disregards the normative and ontological assumptions on which the previous phenomena are based. It provides an analytical tool to understand the communicative and power-imbued processes that result in state-building policies. Closely connected with the emic term of *ko fol*, informality as a prism is analogous with an interpretive filter which one uses in order to make sense of one's lived reality, react to it and, in turn create it through one's understandings. In less abstract terms, the informal prism can be likened to a set of colored glasses. In the context of informality, these glasses work for their wearer in a way that distorts their perception of reality. For my research participants, the lived reality was that turning to informal social connections was a primary way of navigating administrative obligations in both local and international institutions. The 'formal' requirements, procedures, rules, norms and obligations, were to them the distortive coloring that hid the true matter of how things were. While carefully avoiding normative labeling of the terms 'formal' and 'informal,' this research is set in a social environment which strikes newcomers as well as long-term residents and researchers with an acute sense of lethargy and impasse (Jansen et al., 2016; Kurtovic, 2012), lack of trust in local institutions (Hakansson and Hargreaves, 2007), prolonged self-imposed victimhood (Helms, 2013), and yearning for normalcy (Jansen, 2015). In this context, I suggest that the workings of the informal prism contribute to the institutional inertia and the wide array of societal frustrations accompanying a cumbersome, extended transition period.

Research choices

Between 2008 and 2013, I spent about four years living and working in Bosnia. During this time it became clear to me that the way informality was used to navigate most social relations could be

investigated in a variety of venues. In 2012, when I was going back to Bosnia for fieldwork, re-entering the field of international organizations seemed to be a logical choice in my endeavor to expand our knowledge of the relationship between the formal and informal outside of the boundaries of culturalist expectations. In other words, the choice to start with a participant observation in an international mission was guided by the need to interact with and be surrounded by people of different nationalities coming to work in Bosnia. Additionally, in order to investigate how informality played out in project formulation and implementation, I needed an organization with a high level of interaction with local institutions and non-governmental organizations. An opportunity emerged through private connections I had established in my pre-PhD life at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the OSCE)⁸.

Being located within the OSCE enabled me access to the local organizations that the Mission was involved with. During my stay with the organization, I worked in close cooperation with the local communities (MZs, *mjesne zajednice*), local semi-formal organizations that originated as a neighborhood-level governance in socialist Yugoslavia. The OSCE was hopeful that these organizations would become sources of social accountability and greater civic participation in Bosnia. In order to formalize the activities of MZs and promote them among what they saw as an apathetic local population, the Communication Engagement Section of the OSCE decided to collect written and oral knowledge about them and produce a manual. It was through work on this manual that I could observe the interactions between the international organization, its local employees engaged in implementation of projects, and the local counterparts.

⁸ Throughout the text, I interchangeably refer to the OSCE as the Mission.

The choice of my last research venue, the anti-corruption network ACCOUNT, was driven by the desire to explore the world of the international donor community through the eyes of those who over time became dependent on these sources of funding for their livelihood. The network of NGOs associated in their struggle against corruption (and purportedly against *štela*) was formed during the time of my fieldwork, in November 2012. I came into contact with its representatives through my engagement with the OSCE. I spent the first half of 2013 attending the meetings of this organization, driving from workshops to lunches, interviewing and conversing with people working as volunteers or full-time employees at the associated NGOs. In early 2013 the number of organizations reached over a hundred and was growing. While it was impossible to meaningfully engage with a larger part of these NGOs and their employees, I had over time developed a stable interaction with the founding organizations, their representatives, and members of "Whistleblowers", an association of people who reported corruption in their workplace.

Role of ethnography in the study of informality

In political science and policy studies, ethnography and its varieties (political ethnography, multi-sited ethnography, organizational ethnography) have gained prominence relatively recently⁹ (Shore and Wright 2011, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, Schatz 2009). Into these disciplines that were previously dominated by quantitative methodologies, ethnography brought the advantage of deeper and more contextualized understanding of social reality of research participants. In the hands of political scientists, ethnographic or ethnography-inspired research has been embraced both by those writing from positivist as well as interpretive epistemological

⁹ In policy and organizational studies, ethnography builds, however, on earlier sociological studies of the 1920's and 1930's, studies of behind-the-scenes life of bureaucrats and the 'informal organization' in the 1950's (Goffman 1959, 1961, Gouldner 1954, Kaufman 1960). In the following decades, ethnographic research in policy studies became part of the methodological renewal appreciating the input of in-depth qualitative methods (see further Ybema 2009).

positions (Schatz 2009). For those conducting positivist research projects, knowledge generated through deep immersion in the field helps to test existing theories, while for interpretivists, the quest for understanding human sense-making through language, 'culture', 'identity', 'scripts and schemas', 'values, feelings, and beliefs' (Ybema et al 2011: 8) has often been used to refine conceptualizations of the experience-distant phenomena with a local perspective.

This research is embedded in the interpretive tradition and uses the ethnographic method to expand the understanding of the relationship between the 'formal' and the 'informal.' In order to do so, I have deployed several fieldwork strategies, including participant observation, informal conversations, and formal interviewing. Where indicated, I have also confronted the process of actors' meaning-making with close reading of documentary sources. The research process was far from dry, direct and one-directional. It would be hypocritical to claim that establishing friendships, talking, laughing and having numerous coffees¹⁰ during my fieldwork served the solitary purpose of this research. However, in the study of a subject as delicate as the use of one's connections and informal ties, establishing such closeness was inevitable. It has enabled me to engage not only with what people do and what they say they do, but also with what they say on record, in official settings, on the front stage¹¹ and what is being said in the hallways, over lunch, in the back stage. My research has proved Ybema's (2011) suggestion that through developing closer relationships with research subjects, ethnography has the "potential to make explicit the overlooked and concealed dimensions of meaning-making."

¹⁰ Having a coffee serves an important social function in Bosnia; it is the primary reference of socializing. Apart from the three differing terms for coffee in the 'local' language, Serbian *kafa*, Croatian *kava* and Bosnian *kahva*, there are also several expressions that mark the specific usage of a coffee-drinking occasion, such as *sikteruša* - colder coffee served to guests who are tacitly asked to leave. The phrase *popit ćemo kafu* ("we'll drink coffee") is often used instead of "see you later" or "talk to you later."

¹¹ See chapter 5 where I deal with the dramaturgical approach and the front stage/back stage tension in further detail.

In my fieldwork in Bosnia, conducted between May 2012 and July 2013, I used the principles of organizational ethnography (*in situ* participatory observation, ethnographic sensibility, multivocality, reflexivity and positionality) to guide the process of my research. The raw data was composed of field notes¹² where I recorded close-ups of actors' personalities, their surroundings, their official roles and project objectives they were working on. Predominantly, however, these were observations of the interpersonal dynamics, and the way people labeled them, and made sense of them in different social contexts. I took note of the register and the language used - in my case, this referred mostly to what was said in English and what was said in Bosnian. This general observation would then denote a particular discourse: the type of narratives, self-representations, metaphors, jargon, jokes and rumors. In the study of behind-the-scenes informality, "gossip" became an essential source of data. It has enabled me to question the deeply embedded taken-for-granted beliefs about the actors' identities and organizational aspects of behavior. It has also enabled me to delve into the core of the crucial tenet of informality studies: the tension between practices and *perceived* practices of informal behavior.

The principle of multivocality has been embraced in the polyphony of people whose voice is channeled through this research. These include people who were born in Bosnia, as well as expatriates, who came to work there for several years, months, or decided to stay forever,¹³ people of both urban as well as rural background,¹⁴ people of different educational and class backgrounds,¹⁵ and ages. The knowledge presented in this research has been co-generated in

¹² In terms of a data recording technique, the standard field journal notes were taken throughout all three stages of the ethnographic research, in both hand-written and computerized form.

¹³ For this group of people, the term *bostranci*, composed of *Bosanci* ('Bosnians') and *stranci* ('foreigners'), is finding its way to Bosnian vocabulary, see further in chapter 3.

¹⁴ While based in Sarajevo, parts of the research for chapters 4 and 5 were conducted in rural areas of Bosnia where the institution of local communities was expected to produce bigger results.

¹⁵ While most of my informants at the OSCE were upper middle class university educated professionals, participants from the rural local communities had in most specialized secondary education.

interactions among these interlocutors and between the interlocutors and myself. In this sense, as per the ethnographic principle of reflexivity, the way the research participants related to me and what image of me in the multiple positionalities I represented they had, influenced the research outcome. This also differed in between the three research sites that I explored for the project. In the first two phases of the research, when I was working from within the OSCE first as an intern and then as a consultant, research participants related to me more in my insider/co-worker, than an outsider/researcher, role. This also means that I was able to use here more of my direct experience from interacting and working in this environment. In the third phase, when I was engaged with anti-corruption ACCOUNT movement, my role as an outsider/researcher was more dominant. People in the movement did not perceive me as one of them, and even though we spent extended hours together in official and off-stage settings, I had to rely more on their experience and narrated observations.

In order to explore the potential of the research situation, I recorded semi-structured interviews with selected research participants. In the first two stages of my research, these were complementary to the ethnographic research. In some cases, these interviews confirmed what was originally considered to be true of conducting interview-based research in informality studies: especially while conducted in the proximity of their workplace, participants were reluctant to speak openly about issues that were generally rendered as taboo (such as the internationals' labeling). As a standard practice in ethics of organizational research, I promised complete confidentiality by covering interlocutors' identity, nationality and other incriminating details. Through everyday contact with the agency's international and local employees, I was able to observe how their world is shaped from within – ranging from running of the projects, relations among employees, inner divisions and identities – and on the outside – being embedded in a particular, exceptional

institutional and cultural setting. I also had the opportunity to go through internal documents of the section, participate in field trips and discuss and compare understandings of the key terms and concepts.

Postsocialist camaraderie

The results of ethnographic research are always influenced by the persona of the researcher. In the Bosnian context, nationality, occupation, gender, age, education as well as personality played the most important roles in how the research participants perceived me and how I interacted with their lived world. To many Bosnians, I was a *čehinja* (Czech woman), an identity that bore a particular set of gendered and ethnic connotations. In terms of nationality, these were partially embedded in the discourse of Czechoslovak (later Czech or Slovak) tourists that used to come to the former Yugoslav sea coast for vacation. Czechs were not seen as 'real foreigners' (*pravi stranci*) but due to the linguistic and cultural proximity, as 'almost ours' (*skoro pa naši*). The figure of a Czech tourist was a frequent object of jokes that were made around their infamous frugality. However, there was an air of endearment and postsocialist cultural intimacy in the way Czechs and Slovaks were approached in the minds of former Yugoslavs. The common socialist past formed a point of reference for many of my friends and research participants.¹⁶

Subjectively, the level to which I associated or disassociated myself from the organization varied from a day to day: there were days when I felt and acted more as a participant than an observer, and vice versa. The emic/etic tension was especially pronounced at the beginning of my stay. While the nature of this project and my engagement with the organization was in broad terms

¹⁶ This point of reference was tainted, however, with the unfavorable comparison of how the two former federations managed their secession and coped in postsocialist times. My nationality often triggered informants into nostalgia over times in which Yugoslavia fared better than Czechoslovakia, concluding that things were a bit different after the latter federation seceded without resorting to violence.

explained to all key participants, only a few had idea of what political/policy ethnography actually entails. In the beginning, some of the interlocutors provided me with suggestions on what I should research, having an own understanding of what would be an interesting material to look at, or having an image of a researcher that is usually connected to a survey-based, quantitative approach used for project evaluations, progress reports, or other policy documents they know from an organizational practice. The interlocutors needed to incorporate me into their known world and define my role in their social context. Such behavior is to a certain extent inevitable in a research environment of highly educated professionals, as is the suspicion of some of the interlocutors who are knowingly ‘under research.’

For interpretive researchers, means of accessing the field is a source of data in and of itself (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). For me, this meant the necessity to reflect on my entry into the world of international and local state-builders in Bosnia. Prior to starting my doctoral research project, I had worked in Bosnia for an international agency for two and half years. As mentioned earlier, my access to the field was thus secured through a personal connection from my previous work engagement. This initially influenced the level of openness I experienced with my co-workers/interlocutors, who in the beginning saw me as someone close to the boss or, as some had uttered through the organizational grapevine, her *štela*. While uncomfortable at first, during the second stage of my engagement I appreciated the informal nature of my entry to the organization as a conversation trigger and a source of data in itself: in the countless conversations I have had with Mission employees, I often used the informal way through which I entered the organization as a conversation prompt to which the interlocutors often warmed up and shared their own experience with organizational informality.

Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical positioning of this research project. 'Informality' in political, policy and governance studies has been imbued with a static quality based on several meta-theoretical assumptions. The chapter discusses these assumptions, grouped into two interrelated domains: normative and ontological one. On a normative level, the chapter deconstructs the composition of the formal/informal binary, parallel with the universal/particular, in which 'formal' action is portrayed as superior and more favorable to the 'informal' domain. Subsequently, the chapter deals with the very being of the 'informal' realm and questions the human capacity to dissect it into related phenomena of networks, practices and institutions. The chapter proposes a departure from these premises and embraces an interpretive research framework, in which the analysis of meanings that people attach to their cognitive labeling in the process of communication takes the primary role. In this endeavor, the chapter joins the anthropology literature on statehood and state evasion. This literature shares with the interpretive turn in political science the aim of deconstructing policy in order to reveal the patterns and dynamics in the organization of power and governance in society. From this perspective, the chapter proposes the grounded theory of politics of informality.

In chapter 2, I introduce the Bosnian concept of informality in the guise of *štela* and the related phenomena of *marifetluk*, *ćeif* and *mala vrata*, known in the country since socialist and pre-socialist times. In a linguistic-historical expose, I demonstrate that the roots of the *štela*-system date back to pre-socialist period. While standard informality literature tends to overtly ascribe informality to legacies of socialism, little has been written to challenge this temporal, spatial and ideological assumption. The chapter further addresses the three aspects of *štela* as referring simultaneously to the person who provides the connection through which a service can be obtained, the act of exchange between this person and the one who seeks access to a given service, and the

system through which the distribution of services and favors operates. Based on a Herzfeldian analysis of cultural intimacy, the chapter then discusses the socialization aspect and attitudes towards the system. This point further departs from the institutionalist, top-down accounts of informality and their assumption that *štela*-like phenomena are inherently negative. As the Bosnian informants in this chapter show, informality is ambiguous and its representations differ on the inside and outside. On the inside, in relation to the quality of statehood, participation in *štela*-system is met with a sense of embarrassment. On the outside, however, in the context of personal skills and achievements, it is defended with pride.

While chapter 2 prepares the ground for an understanding of informality in the local context, chapter 3 expands the universe of meanings analysis to Bosnians ('locals') and foreigners ('internationals') employed within a large Sarajevo-based international bureaucracy. Looking at how practices and perceived practices of informality are labeled by these groups of informants reveals how identity and power structures play out in negotiating the formal/informal boundary. In this chapter, I theorize the concept of internationality as a category of practice, manifested through the way informality gets treated by actors within the OSCE. In several ethnographic accounts taken from the perspective of an insider (participant observer), I show the role informality plays in the perpetuation of identities, roles and employment at the organization. Material in this chapter leads toward the formulation of the concept of *ko fol* state-building and facade institutionalism, concepts that embody the distrust in fake formalism and professionalism brought by the foreign agents, and elaborated in chapter 5. Apart from these theoretical propositions, the close-up snapshot of dynamics at the organization, taken at the difficult times of mission downsizing, contextualizes our understanding of the pitfalls of long-term state-building mission impasses.

Chapter 4 goes further into unpacking how informality works on the outside of the OSCE, within the formulation and implementation parts of the policy cycle. The chapter uncovers the crucial role of local employees as brokers in the process of *translating down* the international policies. In my analysis of the interpretive filter of *ubleha*, the local counterparts understand project formulation initiatives as essentially nonsensical. The 'interpretive labor' the translators have to exert in order to appropriate and make sense of the demands of the international agency means that part of the project targeting the management of informality become translated in emic terms as exactly those concepts and practices of informality that the agency was aiming to suppress. In this chapter, I further show the communication pitfalls of translating down through the *ubleha* filter of informality on the implementation end of the process, in interactions between the OSCE and the local semi-formal organizations, known as *mjesne zajednice* (MZs).

In chapter 5 I analyze the concepts of informality in a reverse direction to the previous chapter. Through the prism of performativity and the politics of 'as if', I look at the role informality played in interactions between local actors associated in the anti-corruption network ACCOUNT. In this chapter, I introduce the complementary process of *translating up*, looking at the ways Bosnians employed in the civil society sector labeled, presented and translated their activities to fit the language of the international donors. As I argue, local concepts of informality in this process played the role of an interpretive lens (known in the local language as *ko fol*, as if) through which boundaries between the behavior of international and local institutions were further dismissed. This adds up to a particular version of state-building in which all formal institutional interaction is perceived as fake, while it is expected by both parties to the interaction that the actual way things are to be arranged is through networks of informality. The manifestations and effects of this performative filter are in this chapter discussed as *ko fol* state-building.

1. Theorizing informality

This chapter explores the ways in which the concept of 'informality' has been studied in social sciences and positions the key argument of this thesis about the nature of the relationship between the formal and informal domains of human behavior. As Msztal (2000) pointed out, in everyday language, the 'informal' evokes a non-ceremonial, unofficial, "relaxed" way of approaching people and events. In social sciences, however, the concept of informality has been imbued with a set of meanings that are based on a specific set of assumptions.

In this chapter, I classify these assumptions into normative, ontological and epistemological concerns. The normative dimension of the term 'informal' has arguably presented the phenomenon as a negative term, residual to the workings of 'formal' institutions. Notably, most of the political science literature has associated 'informality' with the potentially detrimental phenomena outside of the regulatory power of the state (Christiansen and Neuhold, 2012; Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, 2006; Lauth, 2012; North, 1990; Reh, 2012). In this vein, scholars have focused on researching the 'informal' as a synecdoche for informal economy, corruption, clientelism, nepotism and their particular local varieties.¹⁷ It is portrayed as at best a coping mechanism of decaying, weak or otherwise dysfunctional formal structures, and at worst a direct threat to formal, democratic order.¹⁸ These notions are closely tied to the ontological assumptions, i.e. those that revolve around the nature of studied phenomena. In this respect, the 'informal' has been constructed as an opposite term to 'formal' and, as a qualifier, attached to an ever growing group of phenomena. Among these, informal institutions, practices, networks and governance have gained most prominence in the academic literature. Finally, epistemological considerations relate to the positions from which

¹⁷ Fiddling, embezzlement, mafia networks are one such example of these phenomena.

¹⁸ Some authors who base their analysis in the institutionalist tradition, however, show how 'informal institutions of accountability' help in situations of formal institutional weakness (see Tsai 2007).

claims regarding the nature of the 'informal' have been made. On this front, this research joins the interpretive, ethnographic literature in political science and anthropological accounts of informality, that have sought to paint a more nuanced image. This image expands on Misztal's (2000) pioneering account on the sociology of informality, in which she seeks to view the formal and the informal as equally worth processes, each characterizing the problems of human interaction.

The chapter departs from these premises and shifts informality research towards an interpretive research framework, and a grounded theory of the politics of informality.

1.1. Normative concerns: Deconstructing the formal/informal binary

There is a series of dichotomies that have marked scholarly writing on social dynamics and human behavior in the social sciences. The binaries in questions include the traditional versus the modern, the pre-capitalist and the capitalist, the legal and the illegal, the licit and the illicit. The formal versus the informal is a continuation in this chain of binaries that attempt to explain the evolution of modernity built on opposites. In this dualistic rendering, the progress of modernity itself is seen as a movement from informal, face-to-face, spontaneous, particular types of relationships to the formal, rational, contract-based, universal types of relations. The logic of progress based on binaries implies a normative inclination towards rendering one of the pair as more desirable, evolved, superior to the other one. In this vein, the dichotomy of formal versus informal in political science literature has been built on the normative precedence of the 'formal' domain, with the emphasis on regulation, transparency and universalism over the 'informal'.

The attachment of the 'informal' to the 'particular' and the 'vernacular' has led some scholars to consider it as detrimental to successful state-building (O'Donnell 1996, Rothstein 2011, Migdal

1998, Mungiu-Pippidi 2005, 2006). For instance, in his account of state-society relations, Migdal (1998) highlights the role of particularized, informal practices in preventing state institutions from taking root. Similarly, in a study on the area of the Balkans, Mungiu-Pippidi (2005) sees 'Balkan particularism' and 'structural informal continuities' as accountable for the failure of 'externally induced processes of modernization' (p. 49). In this literature, the informal/formal binary is seen as parallel to the antagonism between particularism and universalism, and these are seen as values embraced by societies at different stages of their evolution. While the principle of the 'informal' springs from collectivist societies governed by specific rules, its opposite arises in individualist societies governed by general rules. Universalistic, individualist societies are in this literature associated with higher levels of associational life, higher levels of trust. Their formal structures derive legitimacy from, in Weberian terminology, rational-legal rule. Not surprisingly, this is opposed by charismatic-traditional rule, lower levels of associational life and trust in particularized, collectivist societies.

This research departs from these premises. In terms of normative rendering, the results of my research show that the 'informal' could not be dismissed as inherently detrimental or residual to formal structures. In this vein, the theoretical claim in this dissertation builds on those sources in social science literature that digress from the notion of the 'informal' as parasitic on and residual to formal arrangements. The most notable grounds for this chain of thinking have been laid by Bourdieu (1990, elaborated further below) and Scott (1998) who claims that "formal order (...) is always and to some considerable degree parasitic on informal processes, which the formal scheme

does not recognize, without which it could not exist, and which it alone cannot create or maintain" (1998: 310)¹⁹.

The predominant normative labeling of the 'informal' as a sphere of the residual and the pre-modern has had an impact on visions of how state-building and development projects ought to be carried out. Transferred into the world of policy-making ideas and objectives, the normative approach towards the informal, labeled as particular and backward, has informed attempts at eradicating patterns of informality in developing and post-conflict societies that were under-going international intervention.²⁰ These attempts have also reflected the essentialist tendencies that have influenced much of Western treatment of and intervention in the 'Orient'²¹.

1.2. Ontological concerns: What *is* the informal?

Connected with the normative understanding of inferiority of the 'informal' in the formal/informal binary is the assumption of the very being of the two separate domains, and the human possibility to distinguish them. These concerns revolve around the question of what *is* the informal, and consequently, what are the sources of the informal, understood as a detrimental phenomenon. In standard political science literature, notably the institutionalism stream, the essence of the 'informal' has been taken for granted as a discrete entity with its possibility to be dissected into separate related phenomena (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006, Lauth 2012, Christiansen and

¹⁹ In his writing, the opposition between the formal and the informal is still embodied in two opposing sources of knowledge: *metis*, the particular, local, experience-based knowledge, and *techne*, its universalizable antidote. As an example of situations in which reliance on *techne* leads to societal and economic paralysis, he mentions the account of the French tradition of the work-to-rule strikes, in which the workers express their discontent by adhering strictly to formal rules (Scott 1998: 310-311).

²⁰ On this note, Mungiu-Pippidi (2006) advises suppressing patterns of particularism and informal behavior in the Balkans, and Rothstein (2011) suggests achieving formal order in a radical, rather than incremental way. On the contrary, in Scott's view, any effort at change should reflect local knowledge in taking small steps towards an incremental change, favor reversibility, as well as to plan on surprises and human inventiveness (Scott 1998: 344-345).

²¹ For a deconstruction of the East/West binary in the context of the Balkans, see Todorova (1997).

Piattoni 2004, Christiansen and Neuhold 2012). Here, literature speaks of phenomena which have attached themselves to the qualifier 'informal.' Among these, informal networks, informal practices, informal institutions, and most recently informal governance attracted the attention of most of the sociologically informed and political science literature. Distinguishing between these concepts in current literature is, however, not an easy task as some of these concepts overlap, are used interchangeably or are reinterpreted by others²². The usage of one of these concepts, however, often indicates the analytical framework of their author.

The 'informal networks' literature has been mostly concerned with the layer of informality, which focuses on analysis of the actors (networks, nodes and ties). The 'informal practices' scholarship has been more geographically grounded than its 'networks' counterpart and has been concerned with closely examining the acts of exchange, associated behavior and structures of power. Finally, the informal institution encompasses both of these layers while adding a third dimension – it systematizes the activity conducted within networks into a pattern organized by rules and sanctions. In the following, I examine in detail the assumptions about the 'informal' based on these three sets of literature.

1.2.1. Beyond networks, practices and institutions

The informal networks literature is nested within two traditions: the sociological accounts of strength of ties (Granovetter 1973, 2005, Lin and Marsden 1985, Lin 2010) and social network analysis (Scott 2000). In the first case, the analysis of networks has been concerned with the qualitative distinction between strong and weak ties. In Granovetter's (1973) conceptualization, strong ties refer to kinship and strong friendship, while weak ties are composed of acquaintances,

²² For instance, while Ledeneva (1998) refers to the Russian system of *blat* as informal practice while Collins (1996) considers the same to be an informal institution.

neighbors and work colleagues. For him, networks matter most in three areas: in the flow and the quality of information, in the source of reward and punishment, and finally in trust²³. In his analysis, weak, heterogeneous ties are considered to be beneficial for transfer of information and increase in particularized trust levels.²⁴ While being one of the cornerstones for theorizing social capital (Putnam 2000, Lin 2010), studying ties in the granovetterian sense gave place to conceptualizing some types of ties as inherently more prone to producing detrimental effects on society than others (see 3.2. in this chapter).

The related field of social network analysis looks not only at the quality of ties but also conceptualizes the nodes, i.e. differing roles actors are ascribed to in a network. From the perspective of roles in provision of goods and services, Boissevain (1978) wrote on networks interaction and structure in Italy. He established a theory of ‘entrepreneurs’, i.e. those who possess either first order resources (land, jobs, scholarship funds, specialized knowledge) and are referred to as *patrons*, and those who dispose of second order resources, i.e. strategic contacts with other people who control resources or who have access to such persons, referred to as *brokers*. Brokers are channels and gatekeepers in social communication; however, in order to generate profit,²⁵ they must put considerable time and effort into maintaining the networks they intentionally use in a barter system. The analysis of networks has greatly influenced systematization of knowledge and

²³ By trust, Granovetter means the "confidence that others will do the 'right' thing despite a clear balance of incentives to the contrary" (Granovetter 2005: 33).

²⁴ Granovetter's weak ties argument was later reinterpreted by Burt (1992) who argues that it may not be the quality of any particular tie but rather the bridging of different parts of networks through nodes – individuals with multiple contacts.

²⁵ Broker derives profit from mainly two sources. Firstly, he may decide just when and just what will be offered as a return service. The second source of profit is his ability to convert his capital and credit into other resources (Boissevain 1978: 161).

analysis of informal exchange. Its concepts have widely been adopted by other scholars focusing on network exchange.²⁶

The second term, ‘informal practice’, typically refers to behavioral patterns guided by widely shared norms (Gouldner 1977). This body of literature has been informed by Bourdieu’s (1990) account on the *Logic of practice*, where he introduces the concept of *habitus* as the “principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (1990: 53). As a system of ‘cognitive and motivating structures’, *habitus* is both a product of history and act of constant inventing and reinventing. It generates behavior that, to the actors within, seems reasonable, commonsensical and likely to be positively sanctioned (Bourdieu 1990: 56). The term informal practice has been adopted by scholars writing on the localized practices of *blat* and *guanxi*, the Russian and Chinese systems of provision. Ledeneva (2008b: 119) defines informal practices as “people’s regular strategies to manipulate or exploit formal rules by enforcing informal norms and personal obligations in formal contexts.” Similarly to Bourdieu, she sees the function of informal practices as responsive to current needs²⁷: in state centralized economies, for instance, their role is to compensate for shortages in state distribution system. However, once the centralized control is removed, their function shifts to “active exploitation of weaknesses in the new systems” (Ledeneva 2008b: 119).

The final concept, informal institution, is closely related to the previous one in that it focuses on the relational and behavioral component of informality, going beyond the mere analysis of

²⁶ Here, the work of Kettering (1986) stands out as an analysis of the role of patrons, clients and brokers in the clientage system of 16th and 17th century France and its impact on formation of the modern state.

²⁷ The variety of needs that *blat* in Soviet Russia and *guanxi* in China cover is: regular needs of daily supply, periodical needs, such as holidays and cultural events, life cycle needs, such as hospital, jobs, education, and the needs of others (Ledeneva 1998: 118).

networks. It builds on North's (1990) concept of institution in which he focuses on the rule-governed component of human interaction. There are many ways to classify institutions: this could be done according to their speed of change (fast or slow moving), the arena in which they are situated (political, social, economic and cultural) or the degree of formality. In the case of formal institutions, both the constraints as well as sanctions imposed on human behavior are codified in written form. This characteristic is missing in the case of informal constraints. In North's (1990) account, informal institutions take on a residual role; their emergence and role in organizing institutional interaction is secondary to the impact of formal institutions²⁸. Works of neo-institutionalist scholars remedy the lack of attention by putting informal institutions in the forefront and seeking to develop a theory that would explain their emergence and role in formal institutional setting. The common denominator among definitions of informal institutions sees them as socially-shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially-sanctioned channels (Helmke and Levitsky 2006, Pejovich 1999, OECD 2006). An essential component of this concept, however, is that similarly to formal institutions, the non-compliance with informal constraints brings about a notion of credible sanctions – these can include physical punishment, loss of employment, or social disapproval (Helmke and Levitsky 2006: 6).

Whereas formal constraints are communicated and enforced through official channels, i.e. courts, police, bureaucracy, etc., some authors considered informal institutions to be self-enforcing through obligation, expectations of reciprocity, “internalized norm adherence, gossip, shunning, ostracism, boycotting, shaming, threats and the use of violence” (OECD 2006). As Helmke and Levitsky (2006: 21) point out, this view would fail to account for those institutions that may be

²⁸ He argues that informal institutions fall into three categories: either they are ‘extensions, elaborations and modifications’ of the formal rules; or they refer to socially sanctioned norms of behavior; and third, they are ‘internally enforced standards of conduct.’ (North 1990: 40)

externally enforced, e.g. through mafia bosses or clans. Their concept of informal institution may thus encompass both phenomena that have been observed across countries (such as clientelism and corruption), but also particular formations (such as Dutch consociationalism, Chilean *concertaciones*, Russian *blat* or Chinese *guanxi*).

The institutionalist literature on informality has recently influenced the arena of governance studies, where Christiansen and Neuhold (2013) conceptually addressed 'informal governance'. Similarly to Helmke and Levitsky's definition of informal institutions, 'informal governance' is seen as such type of governance where participation in the decision-making process is not yet or cannot be codified and publicly enforced (Christiansen 2003) or as "a means of decision-making that is uncoded, non-institutional, and where social relationships and webs of influence play crucial roles [but it] also includes decision-making led by, or occurring entirely within NGOs at all levels" (Harsh in Christiansen and Neuhold 2012: 4).

1.2.2. The dark side of informality

In academic literature, 'informality' has often been used to describe an array of phenomena considered to be detrimental to the functioning of state and society. The following typology organizes these phenomena along two dimensions. The first is formed by the quality of tie based on Granovetter's conceptualization in network theory as described earlier, while the second is formed by the object of barter, which is either prevalently favor-based or monetary. It should be noted, however, that both values are ideal types and should not indicate that some of these phenomena are based *purely* on one type of barter exchange. The favor dimension here builds on the concept of reciprocity (Gouldner 1977) in which favors of access, entry or goods' provision are reciprocated either in kind (homeomorphic reciprocity) or with an equivalent favor in a contextually specific time frame (heteromorphic reciprocity). This is opposed by a monetary-based

type of exchange in which obtaining the desired goods or services is reciprocated rather immediately and in monetary terms.

	Strong ties	Weak ties
Favors	Familism- and nepotism-based exchange (e.g. <i>compadrazgo</i>)	Clientelism-based exchange (e.g. patronage, old boy networks, <i>blat</i> , <i>guanxi</i>)
Money	Mafia-based exchange	Corruption-based exchange (e.g. bribery, embezzlement, graft)

Fig. 1 – Typology of informal institutions based on a strength of ties and the prevalent object of barter

Networks of favor-based exchange between individuals with strong ties exhibit exclusionary behavior known as nepotism. In a nepotistic network, an office holder prefers his own family members in distributing public goods and resources (typically, key political, economic and military positions in the state apparatus, Andvig et al. 2000: 18) and other favors. A similar type of behavior is described as ‘familism’ (Banfield 1958, Woolcock 1998) a driving force for what Collins (2006) theorizes as clans, the “informal organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin and fictive kin identities.” (Collins 2006: 17) She argues that, unlike corruption and mafia networks, clan is not explicitly an illegal practice, and unlike clientelism, it fosters strong relations among kin or fictive kin members, thus it also serves as a source of identity and identification of in-group members. Mafia-like types of exchange, on the other hand, rest primarily on ties between kin and extended kin members, that apart from physical protection seek to generate economic profit (Gambetta 1993).

Clientelism-based forms of exchange find themselves on the other side of the scheme. The term ‘clientelism’ here encompasses a broad family of patterns referred to as ‘clientage’, ‘patronage’

(Kettering 1986), ‘political clientelism’ (Lemarchand and Legg 1972, Radnitz 2011) ‘patron-client politics’ (Scott 1972) or ‘patron-client relations’ (Wolf 1977) that are in some literature used synonymously (Piattoni 2001) in other cases they refer to specific locally based forms of exchange. The common denominator of most definitions is the presence of a dyadic tie between a patron and a client with asymmetric allocation of power and resources. In earlier scholarship on clientelism (Scott 1972, Lemarchand and Legg 1972, Lande and Guasti 1977), the notion of ‘patron’ and ‘client’ relations expands its original confinement to the Mediterranean and Latin America to show that comparable relationships exist in most culture – but are “most strikingly present in preindustrial nations” (Scott 1972: 66). For Scott, the inequality in resources, face-to-face character and diffuse flexibility (existence of multiple ties through which two individuals are connected) are key components of clientelism. While client finds himself in a situation when he cannot reciprocate quid-pro-quo to patron’s services, a debt of obligation binds him to the patron. The role of ‘broker’ can sometimes enter the tie between patron and client and has been documented e.g. in 17th century clientelism in France (Kettering 1986); these roles are, however, interchangeable, in that some patrons serve simultaneously as brokers, and vice versa. In a more recent scholarship, a sub-type of clientelism coined as ‘subversive clientelism’ emerges to denote a possible political tool in mass mobilization (Radnitz 2011).

Finally, the standard conceptualization of corruption²⁹ in political science and economy distinguishes corruption from clientelism in that the exchange of money (or monetizable goods) is involved for decisions on the part of career or elected officials that favor economically particular individuals or groups.” (Piattoni 2001: 7) However, there are several approaches to the study of

²⁹ Corruption gets often divided up to ‘political’ or grand corruption and ‘bureaucratic’ or street-level corruption (Andvig et al. 2000), some authors however argue that political corruption is hardly distinguishable from political clientelism (Della Porta and Meny 1997)

corruption. Broadly, one can distinguish between the ones employed by political scientists and political economists, such as Rose-Ackerman (1999) and Klitgaard (1988) who see corruption as the 'misuse of public office for private gain'³⁰ and focus on causes and effects of corruption³¹, and sociologist and social anthropology approaches (Sampson 2005, Shore and Heller 2005). In the latter camp, Ledeneva (2009a) provides a succinct critique of what she calls the 'new corruption paradigm' (2009a: 69), which according to her, rests on three major flawed assumptions: first, the cultural and historical neutrality of the definition; second, the possibility of objective measurement; and third, the implications for policy-making. Contradicting these assumptions, the authors within this camp point out that the corruption paradigm rests on the historically and culturally embedded notion of the public/private divide. Relying on the perception of public and private as discrete realms, together with the shared ideal³² of the ethical relations between client, agents and principals in the public realm, informs a normative perspective on 'corruption-as-deviance' (Ledeneva, 2008b: 71). One further point raised against the classic definition of corruption is that the typology of corruption it devises, in terms of scale, frequency, motivation, is rarely shared by those actually involved in the corrupt exchange (Haller & Shore, 2005; Ledeneva, 2009a).

1.2.3. Sources of informality

Existing accounts of informality have been to a great extent preoccupied with the question of its sources: what is the reason that people resort to using informal channels for navigating official

³⁰ Klitgaard's (1988) formula for the occurrence of corruption is "Monopoly + Discretion – Accountability = Corruption."

³¹ Aside from economic reasons, in conventional political science these are believed to be deficiencies in the political system, notably the democratic deficit, but interplay between institutions and role of civil society have also been the object of interest in comparative corruption studies. (Andvig et al. 2000: 53)

³² Sampson (2005: 26) argues that this is an ideal which is far from accomplishment in Western countries, let alone from ones 'transitioning' from a collective system of a decade long suppression of private ownership and ethics of public-private dualism.

rules and procedures? The way the institutionalist literature in political science has tackled this question is reminiscent of the universalism-particularism normative divide described earlier in section 2.

1.2.3.1. *Universalist explanations*

The universalist expectations can be grouped into five constellations related to the strength and quality of the formal system, its effectiveness and legitimacy.

First, it is the absence or weakness of state institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2006; Meyer 2006, Radnitz 2011). This source is the common denominator in institution-oriented literature. It reflects the default role of informality often preceding the development of formal institutions (Kettering 1986) but it refers also to situations when formal rules do not exist or are weak³³, inconsistent, in a lack of control ‘from above’ or ‘from below’ (Meyer 2006), or in a state of insecurity accompanying the transition process (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Examples of these may include elite-centered informal institutions, such as *concertaciones* in Mexico, or grassroots informal institutions, such as *rondas campesinas* in Peru. The second source of informality has been identified as the lack of capacity to create formal solutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006, Mershon 1994). This explanation shifts the attention towards the actors who purposefully create informal institutions: these emerge as the second best strategy in situations when actors find it impossible to restore formal order otherwise. An example of such activity may be the elite-created

³³ Assessing state weakness is a complex task in itself. The state-building literature and international development agencies derive a plethora of related concepts to account for state fragility: weak states are defined as those that have a deficiency in control of all or part of the state territory; divided states are those with an essential fragmentation of society drawn along ethnic, religious and other lines; for related concepts of failing and failed states see Paris and Sisk (2009) and Milliken (2003).

‘electoral insurance’ in Chile (Siavelis 2006), reacting to the electoral system that was impossible to be changed due to the power of the military.

The third explanation involves the attainment of publicly or internationally unacceptable goals (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006). This includes cases where actors resort to informal strategies in order to mobilize funds for public campaigns, such as in Brazil (Samuels 2006) or to circumvent human rights or other internationally held conventions, such as in the political appointments through the system of *dedazo* in Mexico (Langston 2006).

Fourth, informality is expected to originate in the lack of democratic traditions. Meyer (2006) sees the lack of democracy with respect for formal rules (rule of law), as possibly a separate factor in the emergence of informal constraints. This factor is combined with the quality of formal rules, i.e. contexts in which the formal system is too complex, abundant, inflexible or incoherent. Meyer (2006) lists a set of additional qualities of formal rules that may incur in resorting to informal institutions: formal rules are too hard to understand and comply with, they are implemented in a rigid, highly formalized way, or there is a gap between their normative claims and their actual functioning. Finally, economist literature mentions poverty as a factor contributing to the proliferation of informal rules (Portes, Castells, Benton 1989).

1.2.3.2. *Particularist explanations*

Contrary to the views that the creation of informal institutions follows some universalizable logic, a set of particular explanations has been formulated by some authors, suggesting that informality should be understood in its own terms (Ledeneva 1998, 2009a, Lomnitz 1988, Rivkin-Fish 2005, Werner 2000). This literature focuses on contextually specific sets of practices and examines the cultural and historical roots of informality. Among these factors the socialism-induced economy

of shortage has gained significant attention (Ledeneva 1998, Rivkin-Fish 2005, Scott 1972). This is the explanation that is often cited in literature on *blat* and (pre-industrial) clientelism. In the first case, the Soviet-style economy is considered a catalyst in creation of informal institutions, while in the latter case,³⁴ reciprocity-based barter exchange is attributed to societies with lack of resources and asymmetries in access to these resources (Scott 1972, Lemarchand and Legg 1972).

More generally, norms of reciprocity (Mauss 1989 [1924], Gouldner 1977, Werner 2000, Lomnitz 1988) have been associated with the differing sense of obligation among societies as well as the implications of kin, family and friendly ties. While, for instance, in some contexts the concept of a neighbor implies expectations of obligation and provision,³⁵ in others such expectations are non-existent (Sorabji 2008). Related to this was the difference in understanding of the public versus the private domain (Ledeneva 2009a, b). Similarly, the understanding of the dimensions of 'public' and 'private' differs among societies and may be influenced by a set of particular cultural roots, such as socialism and confucianism.

Religion has also played a role in particularist explanations. As Hall (1977) points out, in many Mediterranean and Latin American countries, the spread of popular Catholicism helped to reinforce clientelism through preaching „the need for protectors and benefactors, both human and divine“ (Hall 1977: 510). Furthermore, particularist political culture is seen as the presence of particularized values as one reason why informal constraints proliferate (Mungiu-Pippidi 2005).

The particularist explanations have been embodied also by the literature on path dependency. This approach would view informal institutions as an offspring of country's historical and cultural

³⁴ Criticizing the unilinear developmentalist discourse, Roniger and Gunes Ayata (1994: 19) note that patron-client relations were for long considered a pre-modern formation and were expected to be replaced by 'modern' forms of participation, which however did not occur despite predictions of transitions and democratization literature.

³⁵ Sorabji (2008) for instance describes how reciprocity evolved in pre- and post-war Bosnian *komsiluk* (neighborhood), which functions it served and what implications it has for the public life.

background. Such proposition helps explain why countries differ in micro-mechanisms and rules governing the system, as well as in the strength and pervasiveness. For instance, Hall (1977) and Scott (1972) amongst others traced the roots of patron-client relations in feudalism.

1.3. Interpretivism and informality studies

As Ybema (2009) explains, the 'interpretive turn' or 'interpretive paradigm' formed an antidote to positivist and empiricist theories of science, and came as a response from US authors influenced by late nineteenth- to early mid-twentieth century Continental philosophy. The timing of these shifts coincided with a series of other 'turns' that marked the shift towards blurring the boundary between the object and subject of research and taking language (and communication seriously)³⁶. One of the essential foundational texts of interpretivism in social sciences, Charles Taylor's 1971 essay on "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", summarizes what can be taken as a manifesto of interpretivism in social sciences:

We can speak of mutual dependence if we like, but really what this points up is the artificiality of the distinction between social reality and the language of description of that social reality. The language is constitutive of the reality, is essential to its being the kind of reality it is. To separate the two and distinguish them as we quite rightly distinguish the heavens from our theories about them is forever to miss the point. (Taylor 1985 [1971], 34)

In linguistics, this relationship between what Taylor describes as 'reality' and language, became one of the central questions of the discipline: does language structure perception and thought or vice versa? In social sciences, questioning the how one arrives to knowledge, early interpretive thinkers turned to Kantian idea of depending on a priori knowledge, which influenced the thinking on researcher and her subjectivity in the researcher-researched relations. Kuhn (1970) in this

³⁶ Such as the linguistic, rhetorical, narrative, historic, metaphorical, argumentative, and, most recently, a practice turn; for discussion of these see Ybema (2009) and Wagenaar (2011).

respect formulated his idea of pre-established 'conceptual boxes' and categories of thought that structure perception and “filter” various physical sensations. In a conceptual sense, these categories of mind were not necessarily manifested in observational world – they were prerequisites to making sense of the phenomenal (empirical) world.

Acknowledgement of the a priori knowledge that influenced the new generated knowledge gave way to the tradition of social science research, appropriated also by political science and international relations and European studies which elaborated the concept of *verstehen* (understanding) as opposed to *erklären* (explaining). The explanatory processes aim to explain human experiences in terms of natural or physical events outside of the observer/researcher – attending to ‘objective’ events rather than to ‘subjective’ (internal) ones. The 'understanding' tradition, however, emphasizes the intersubjective nature of research and the need for production of context-specific meanings (Ybema 2009). Indeed, it is the individual (researcher), who is involved in a production of meaning through being embedded in a community of meaning with specific social practices and collective presuppositions.

1.3.1. In search of meaning

In placing meaning at the forefront of social science inquiry, interpretive methodologists of policy studies (Wagenaar 2011, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012) outlined several possible ways in which meaning can become the object of analysis. In presenting the 'three faces of meaning' in his extensive methodological account of the interpretive research process, Wagenaar (2011) typifies the characteristics of, the hermeneutic, discursive and dialogical meaning. Within the first tradition, it is the task of the researcher to "make the actions of individual agents intelligible against a backdrop of shared understandings and routines" (Wagenaar 2011: 40). Discursive meaning, in turn, "focuses on the large linguistic-practical frameworks, unnoticed by individual agents, that

constitute the categories and objects of our everyday world. These frameworks act both as grids of possibilities (making certain practices and beliefs possible, natural, and self-evident) and conceptual horizons. (p. 40). Dialogical meaning, on the other hand, focuses on the social and practical nature of meaning – despite meanings being held by individuals, they in fact depend on the agency being shared among actors engaged in communication.

Wagenaar (2011) sees three major contributions that phenomenology gave to social sciences. First, the human actors grasp the world by constantly interpreting their own acts and those of others. In Heideggerian phenomenology, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of the individual is the location where meaning-making takes place. It is the bedrock of beliefs, the place that shapes and reaffirms one's sense of oneself and the elements of one's social world. The legacy of this tradition in political and policy studies paved the way for analysis of lens, frames, paradigms, worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Second, moving from an individual's perception of reality, there is the problem of how to arrive at shared meanings – the problem of intersubjectivity. Solving this problem led to hermeneutics. The third insight suggested that "the individual is the primary source of knowledge of the 'life-world.'" (p. 45). For Schutz and Heidegger experience was about 'being in the world' and so its analysis, too, should be about engaging that world rather than bracketing it and setting it aside. For understanding meanings from this perspective, Schutz (1967, 1973) reminds us that each participant in a meaning exchange approaches a communicative situation with her lifeworld background, composed of past experience, education, training, family, community, regional, national background, and character.

In political/policy sciences, phenomenology has been used not just to explain the individual but also the collective selves: how is it that in communal, political, organizational, and other collective settings and encounters people manage to understand one another without necessarily making

explicit the “rules” for living that they, by and large, adhere to? In the organizational setting, Berger and Luckmann (1966) provide an account of how rules gradually merged into unspoken practices, becoming tacit knowledge. Hermeneutics then adds to this formula the dimension of human meaning. Such meaning is not expressed directly, but projected onto artifacts by their creator, so it can be known through interpreting these artifacts. Hermeneutics, as Wagenaar puts it (p. 47), “brings the smells and sounds of the world, a measure of objectivity if one wants, to the purely intentionalist account of meaning in phenomenology.” The place to look for intentionality is within the act itself, not within the mind of the actor. This requires the hermeneutic analysis be placed in a wider social circle, alluding to the concept of ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Wagenaar 2011: 4), in which in order to understand the part, the research needs to look at the logic of functioning of the whole. Usage of hermeneutic method, however, has led to what has been called ‘meaning realism’, i.e. the “view that meanings are fixed entities that can be discovered and that exist independent of the observer” (Schwandt, 2000).

The remaining kinds of interpretive meaning-making, discursive and dialogical, form an antidote to the hermeneutical ‘meaning realism’ by suggesting that all perception operates under a particular description. Still, there is a discrepancy between the conclusions that these two approaches draw for human agency. The way discursive approaches deal with individual agency is that they nearly eliminate its potential for meaning-making: individual actors are locked in the meaning structures. There is, however, no ‘world’ or ‘truth’ outside of this cage of meaning, but rather everything is the cage - or, as Allen (1993) puts it, “even truth is the product of perspective.” In hermeneutic/phenomenological approach, meaning is the property of the object of analysis, and the researcher in these traditions is the “knower”, who gains knowledge ‘about’ an object - the act

of knowing is unilateral. In discursive approach, this is impossible, for Fairclough (2001), discourse is defined as "language as social practice determined by social structures".

The present research builds on these legacies in the following ways. It takes the *lifeworld* of the research participants as a source of meaning, not necessarily in order to make claims about 'culture' and 'identity' of the informants, but to analyze how through a set of practices, the language and labeling they choose the actors shape the boundary between the formal and the informal. It also adopts the premise that meaning emerge in a dialogue and are intersubjective. Contrary to propositions of the discursive legacy, these chapters show that individuals are not locked in meaning structures but, through their daily practices and linguistic engagement are in a constant negotiation over what these structures look like. As we will see, this take on meaning interpretation overlaps to a large extent with an epistemology that guides contemporary anthropological research.

1.3.2. Anthropological accounts of informality

In existing accounts of the relationship between the formal and the informal, the interpretive epistemology and the search of intersubjective meaning in negotiating the boundary between what is rendered as 'formal' and 'informal' have been for the bigger part embraced by studies of social anthropologists. With their reluctance to impose academic concepts on empirical reality and their proneness to question and unpack conceptual dichotomies, phenomena that political science associated with informality, such as corruption (cf. 3.1.) have, for a long time, not been referred to explicitly. This does not mean they would have been avoided completely: anthropology has, in fact, a long and rich tradition of studying hidden practices and informal, illegal or semi-legal exchanges. In the 1960's and 1970's, part of anthropological literature addressed the issues of patronage and brokerage, some of which have been explored above (cf. section 3.2., Boissevain 1974, Blok 1969), bribery, reciprocity and gift-giving (Mauss 1989, Moore 1978). It is only later

that studies of corruption were taken conceptually on board³⁷ with a boom of anthropological studies on corruption starting in the late 1990's (Haller and Shore 2005; Hasty 2005; de Sardan 1999; Nuijten and Anders 2007; Ries 2002; Pardo 2004, Schneider and Schneider 2003, 2005, Torsello 2011). In the same period, studies of statehood in postcolonial setting provided another implicit source of knowledge on informality (Gupta 1995, Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, Das and Poole 2004, Das 2007, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Randeria 2002, 2003, 2007, Roitman 2005).

Anthropological accounts that relate to the formal/informal boundary share a set of characteristics that make them the epistemological antidote to the institutionalist approaches described in previous section. First of all, most writers question the inherent normative standpoint of the researcher. They intend to close the distance between researcher and object of research by painting a more nuanced picture of the morality(ies) (Pardo 2004, Parry and Bloch 1989). Coining the term 'conflicting morality', Pardo (2004) has relativized the idea that certain groups have been more justified in making their claim than others. Similarly to this relativizing standpoint, anthropologies of (postcolonial) statehood would find a way to enhance the voice of the individuals in speaking, and often in opposition to, the state apparatus. On a second, and related note, statehood ethnographers have systematically been looking for ways to collapse the normative binaries that political science has taken for granted.

Anthropologists were preoccupied with overcoming what Bourdieu called the 'state thought' (Bourdieu 1994), i.e. "the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state". They would point at the fuzziness of boundaries between 'state' and 'society' (Gupta 1995), between the 'public' and the 'private', the 'legal' and the 'illegal' (Roitman 2005, Randeria 2003, 2007). Writing

³⁷ On this note, Nuijten and Anders (2007) suggest that this was for a long time due to the underlying reluctance within the discipline to pass implicit judgement by using normative concepts.

on the hidden collusion between state officials and clandestine criminal networks in the Chad Basin, Roitman (2005) draws attention to the way in which the legal and the illegal economy are connected and constitute one another. Discovering that the participants in the so called shadow economy (smugglers, highway robbers) collude with government leaders, army officers and wealthy businessmen, she challenges the imaginary divide between informal/formal, official/unofficial, and legal/illegal. With a radical departure from these premises, she argues that the state, in fact, "is at the very heart of the proliferation of unregulated economic exchanges as well as the pluralization of regulatory authority" (Roitman 2005: 204).

Juxtaposing the assumption that one of the sources of informality is the quality of statehood (see above section 3.2), anthropologists have found the dichotomy of weak versus strong statehood as Western-centric. In postcolonial settings, on the other hand, the legal/illegal and formal/informal boundaries get blurred by state action (Randeria, 2005, 2007a,b). The way the so called cunning statehood (Randeria 2005) sustains itself by seeking to redistribute responsibility to various sub-state level actors, aided by transnationally maintained legal plurality within 'weak' post-colonial states.

Building on these premises, recent anthropologists of urban spaces have made substantive contributions to challenging the formal/informal divide. Schindler (2011) in his ethnographic fieldwork in Delhi, India, focuses on the group of street hawkers simultaneously evading, subverting and (re)creating formal regulations who are recognized by the judiciary as legitimate users of public space, yet avoid the municipal authorities raids. He argues that the preconceived notions of 'formality' and 'informality' are of little value in understanding the urban processes, and unpacks how the boundary between formal/informal is produced and contested juridically and through the everyday practices of enforcement officials and the street hawkers. In line with

Randeria's (2007) argument about legal plurality, this demonstrates that while 'the state' theoretically enjoys the monopoly over distinguishing formal from informal, in reality the state is a fractured entity composed of competing interest groups.

1.4. The politics of informality

The argument proposed in my research departs from the normative, ontological and epistemological grounds of standard political science literature explored above. As my research shows, the quality of informality in state-building in Bosnia challenged many of the premises proposed in political science informality studies. On a normative level, practices, networks and institutions of informality could not be safely dismissed as detrimental and malign. They could not be attributed solely to a state behavior and discrepancies in statehood. They were not clearly stemming out of one historical or economic constellation. While the period of Yugoslav socialism and the 1992-95 war certainly played a role in social dynamics in Mature Dayton Bosnia, informality as experienced and observed by Bosnians and foreigners living in the country was not necessarily an outcome of the past. In this vein, it also could not be dismissed as a legacy of one of the earlier administrative periods, including the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian one.

On a related, ontological level, as regards the very being of two discrete realms, the informal and the formal, and the subsequent possibility to typify and categorize the informal into separate phenomena, this research further departs from observations in institutionalism's approach to informality. Rather than seeing the formal and the informal as opposing and clearly delineated phenomena, I join the anthropological literature on informality that suggests deconstructing any such taken-for-granted binaries. My conceptualization of informality addresses the role that power and positionality play in drafting the boundary between the two domains. I propose that the way this boundary is shaped and navigated reflects the role of positionality and power imbued by

various actors in varying degrees. The concept cannot be reduced to economic conditioning; it is an interpretive frame through which human relations are shaped in a political, institutionalized environment. In this sense, the concept expands not only our knowledge of informality but elaborates also new conceptualizations of institutionalism. Fake and Potemkin institutionalism (Allina-Pisano, 2008, 2014) are particularly salient in this context. Among the various groups of actors involved in this research, informality influenced how behavior of institutions and institutionalized actors, be it indigenous or foreign-imposed, was understood by both local and foreign actors. In this context, I argue that the perceived role of their dysfunctioning and reliance on personal channels played a more important role than their actual performance.

In what follows, I will show that informality had a changing quality depending on the context, actors and audience. In this sense, the performative quality of informality brought forth a set of identities and practices that people took on as expressions of their outwardly power and prestige. In this sense, I discuss the role of internationality as a practice, rather an identity, in navigating the fuzzy and situational boundary between the 'formal' and the 'informal'. Based on the ethnographic material gained during my stay with the OSCE in Bosnia, I deconstruct the normative labeling of informality based on local and foreign actors' practices and perceived practices of informality. Here, the argument is that while the practices and perceived practices among these two groups of actors did not significantly diverge, their labeling reflected the power status attached to these groups. However, when it came to labeling informality, the dualism of *us* versus *them* was not endorsed equally by the locals. To them, the *disemia* of these concepts (Herzfeld, 1997) was collapsed, as was the magical cosmology of international exclusiveness.

This research is not the only attempt to enrich theorizing of informality with ethnographic accounts. Morris and Polese (2014, 2015) most recently offer a detailed mapping of informality

and its role in Eastern Europe. Their ethnographic work cements some of the discontents with assumptions with informality studies I have phrased above: they debunk the inherent normative biases and show the human side of post-socialist institutional interactions. My research, however, is different in that it de-essentializes the culturalist and localized notions of informality as an embedded, Eastern, post-socialist practice. My theorizing of informality as an interpretive filter is made possible precisely by bringing on board actors with various cultural backgrounds, thus pushing our thinking of the relationship between the regulated and personal institutional interactions out of geographically delineated boundaries.

In order to show the effect of the informal prism and its role in policy translation within and outside of an international agency, the next chapter prepares the ground by first engaging informality locally: arguing that informality plays an ambiguous role in organizing social life in Bosnia, cannot be easily dismissed as a 'local' version of one of the experience-distant concepts and that it is met by people in Bosnia simultaneously with embarrassment and pride.

2. The importance of having *štela*: Tracing informality locally

What role does informality play in the lives of Bosnians today? How does one search for a *štela*-person and what are the key characteristics of that person? What are the characteristics of the *štela*-system? To have a *štela* in Bosnia means to have access to resources. The common understanding of *štela* is that of a connection that one needs in order to access public goods or services, such as acceptance to a school or university, healthcare, access to authorities, access to services, and visas. As data from 2009 (UNDP 2009) and my own research show, *štela* is a highly pervasive practice, considered both unchangeable ("God-given") and detrimental to the well-being of Bosnians. It exhibits strong familistic features, with family members, especially parents, taking pride in fulfilling their duty to take care of their younger relatives. Similarly to the effects of informality elsewhere in the region, it shifts the local understandings of the 'public' and 'private' and contributes to blur the boundary between them. Before I proceed to problematize the notion of informality as a 'local practice' in the context of international state-building³⁸, it is important to show the complexity of understandings attached to informality in Bosnia and provide an interpretive genealogy of its origin. In order to do so, this chapter follows with an ethnographic account of *štela* and related phenomena, a brief historical expose, linguistic analysis of the three faces of *štela* (*štela*-person, *štela*-act, *štela* -system) and enquiry about ways of socialization into and reproduction of the *štela*-system.

³⁸ This chapter presents the local understanding of informality, the aim here, however, is not to essentialize informality as something unique and representative of Bosnianness.

2.1. Informal phenomena

If you ask a Bosnian ‘what does *štela* mean?’, the immediate, common-sense response will be about a person or a connection³⁹ that one needs to ‘get by’ in most aspects of social life, ranging from once-in-a-lifetime to everyday needs. Typically, responses will include getting a job, getting medical treatment (e.g. surgery), getting bureaucratic paperwork done, getting enrolled into a university, or successfully passing university exams and specialized courses (such as in the medical profession). If you further enquire: ‘who can be your *štela*?’, the response will be less definite: many people say it can be anyone, it just needs to be someone who can set it up for you. It is only deeper into the conversation that one uncovers the multi-layered meanings of *štela* and the significance it holds in organizing life in Bosnia and Herzegovina on almost any level. The lived semantic denotation of *štela* is not entirely negative as one would observe in experience-distant concepts, such as corruption, clientelism or patronage. Unlike most of these, it can be used in a playful manner across paradigms of public and private life. In the words of Katnić-Bakaršić, ‘*štela* and its derivatives [i.e. derived verbs such as *(na)šteliti*, *imati štelu* – to provide *štela*, to have *štela*] have a less negative connotation than the word “corruption”: they are “softer” and more connected to private than to public discourses, although [they are] increasingly common in the public discourse’.⁴⁰

The joyous, playful nature of *štela* was brought up in many conversations during my fieldwork. In this sense, the difference between corruption and *štela* is neatly articulated in the words of Dejan, one of the informants whose narrative is mentioned in chapter 5:

³⁹ *Veza*, meaning ‘a relation’ as well as ‘a connection’, is another term used to refer to the same practice across former SFR Yugoslav countries, including Bosnia.

⁴⁰ Interview with Prof. Dr. Marina Katnić-Bakaršić, Head of Department of Slavic Studies, Philosophical Faculty of University of Sarajevo, 15th May 2008.

Here, you should understand, the common perception, the understanding of corruption is very blurred ... people are educated, taught to act in a certain way. Ever heard of the expression *marifetluk*? You know, it is from the family of turcisms in our language, like the words *ćeif* or *merak* ... Well, *Marifetluk* that is something irregular, it is not entirely bad or negative, but it is like you muddle through (*mučkaš, petljaš*) the system; you manage to get something out of it (*nešto izvučeš*); it is playful but also flattering in some respect. People will say: look at him, he did all right for himself.

Marifetluk here represents the positive aspect of *štela*. In Dejan's vivid account, it embodies joy, pride and mischief. It is important to know what's best for him (*zna za sebe*) or 'find a hole in the law' (*našao je rupu u zakonu*), earning good dough (*zaradio lovnu*). Similarly, people who refuse to take part in the 'the system' will be called out and ridiculed. In Dejan's word, "if you don't take opportunities, your neighbours, everyone will call you a fool (*budala*). People admire those who manage to get by (*koji su se snašli*)."

During one of our morning encounters over coffee in café Sova, Dejan mentioned the example of his late aunt, who through a *štela*-based circumvention of the system managed to build a house during the war 'for only a hundred marks'. During the total chaos of the first years of the war, she managed to claim land that 'was not exactly hers' and found somebody at the municipality who would let her get building material from an abandoned factory nearby. Through these informal connections, she also got a series of loans that she never had to pay back. As Dejan narrated the story, it had become clear to him that he, too, saw the unusualness of the situation and the ways his aunt 'got by' as twisting the letter of the law. But, it is with a sense of pride that he explains that 'smart' people learn how to navigate and then stay afloat. Those who do not take advantage in such situations are called fools. Hence, his *nemoj biti budala* ('don't be a fool!') serves as encouragement to be creative about the formal procedures; succeeding in doing so will yield a higher social recognition in one's reference group.

Dejan's story illuminates the three possible emic denotations of *štela* in colloquial Bosnian. The first-layer immediate response generated in an initial encounter with a curious foreigner is the *štela*-person. This is the acquaintance Dejan's aunt needed at the provisional municipality to get the semi-legal building material (*on je bio njena štela*, meaning 'he was her *štela*'). The second layer, *štela*-act, adds a dimension in which *štela* is increasingly mentioned as 'something that is done' rather than 'someone to be had to set it up' (*dobila je posao preko štele*, meaning 'she got a job through a *štela*'). Finally, an immersion in the discourses in which *štela* is used, the implications of its use, the variety of actors enmeshed in it as well as the omnipresent sense of lack of individual agency in avoiding its unwritten rules, helps to flesh out the final layer: *štela*-system (*tamo ide sve preko štele*, meaning 'there, everything is set up through *štela*'). In accounts of my informants, the 'system' referred to both the complex yet dysfunctional formal governance structure and the informal system of *štela*.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from 1878 to 1918. In the absence of historical-linguistic research on the roots of the word *štela*, it is possible that it entered Bosnian vernacular vocabulary with the German verb *stellen*, meaning 'to provide', or the German noun *die Stelle*, meaning 'a position or a place'⁴¹. Usage of the word *štela* in the sense of *Stelle* ('a position') in socialist Yugoslavia of the 1970's can be illustrated by the following excerpt. It is a reprinted version from the RFE archives using Janez Jerovsek's work 'Balkanism in the organization of work' (Jerovsek 1971). In his account, corruption and the usage of networks were necessary in situations when people had to face excessively long periods for simple reparations in their house or on their car, as well as for other, *inter alia* medical, services:

⁴¹ Based on interview with Prof. Dr. Marina Katnic-Bakarsic, Head of Department of Slavic Studies of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Sarajevo, 25th May 2008.

[O]ne can urge [them], be nice and polite, write letters - none of it makes any difference... When you need the services quickly and well done, you need to know someone in a relevant *Stelle*, someone you are on good terms with, bribe someone there, or pay a fat fee. (translated from German, Jerovsek 1971: 1433)

2.2. Informality in socialist Yugoslavia

Throughout the period of socialist Yugoslavia, media referred to the use of connections using the more innocuous expression *veze*⁴² (lit. meaning 'connections'). Aside from media scandals related to *korupcija* (corruption) and *mito* (bribe, bribery), the importance of *veze* in labor relations, gaining employment and organization of cadres were frequently referred to by news sources⁴³. As a consequence of corruption scandals and the nexus between publicly owned firms and private networks, the domain of politics became imbued with connotations of 'dirty business'⁴⁴. An unexpectedly honest recorded interview with a member of League of Communists after the party's 1968 Belgrade meeting captures the usage of connections (*veze*) in the following way:

There are several factors for this practice [i.e. young people not entering employment after finishing their education]. First of all, our practice regarding employment of young people is very unenviable. For a young worker to get a job, he needs three very important factors. These are – it is sad to say this – good looks, bribery and very good connections. A diploma comes only as the fourth factor. A diploma is needed only for the sake of order, because the open competition for the post states what education is needed. [end recording]"⁴⁵

Apart from *veze*, Yugoslav media referred to a similar way of gaining employment, through the so-called *mala vrata* (litt. 'small door'). As a derogatory term, using *mala vrata* was considered detrimental to social equality. The practice involved opening vacancies in both the public and private sector on the basis of family and friendship connections, with requirements and selection

⁴² In her analysis of informality in the border town of Bijeljina, Brkovic (2014a, 2014b) uses the term *veze*.

⁴³ E.g., reporting on relations within the League of Communists in the late 1960's, Radio Belgrade had discussed usage of *veze* and arbitrariness in the selection of cadres, and in employment of fresh graduates (Munich, Oct 19, 1968, OMD).

⁴⁴ For discussion of the gendered portrayal of the political domain as dirty, see Helms (2007).

⁴⁵ 13 November 1978, "Belgrade LC Committee discusses cadres in economy", RFE collection.

procedure adjusted to suit the pre-selected candidate. Part of this practice involved "marking candidates on the priority list, and those [who were not among selected candidates] were asked to present unrelated achievements and qualifications, in order to show their (...) lack of competence" ("Radna Mjesta Rezervisana Za Prijatelje" 1979, pp. 12-13). It referred also to the employment of children and relatives of employees. In cases of mobilization of weaker ties, *mala vrata* opened the door to bribery, and an unofficial price list of employment on the black market. The director of the Yugoslav Unemployment Bureau, Vljako Stojanovic, described the practice in 1972 in the following way:

With the help of various connections (*uz pomoć raznih veza i vezica*) it is possible to gain employment in some enterprises through *mala vrata*, without [having the] formal qualifications and relevant background. There are various stories that an employment can be gained (...) on the illegal market for around 5000 New Dinars.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the 1990s, the research focus in Bosnia shifted to clientelist networks and the informal practices in maintenance of the nationalist party hegemony (ESI 1999). Simultaneously, researchers started to be interested in fostering of the post-war civil society and the (missing) associational life. Policy-oriented literature held the latter accountable for the lack of trust and cohesion in Bosnian society. This assumption was reflected, i.a., in the three major surveys conducted in the 2000s, that focused on the role of social ties, networks and social capital in generating greater social cohesion and institutional trust: the World Bank's (2002) research on social capital and trust towards local institutions, the 'Trust in Transition' study (Håkansson and Hargreaves 2004) and the UNDP (2009) study on Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the subheading 'The Ties that Bind'. While working on this last report, its authors stumbled upon a conceptual problem: the framework of social capital did not seem to accommodate the local

⁴⁶ Svaka diploma nije zlatna ('Every diploma is not golden'), Interview with Vljako Stojanovic, Director of the Unemployment Bureau. Nedeljne novosti, 16th April 1972, p. 2.

system of favor-based exchange that was reported to mark the public life on so many levels. While the logic of the social capital had it that fostering of weak heterogeneous ties would lead to positive effects on social inclusion and ethnic reintegration, the opposite appeared to be happening: the pre-existing systems of similar connections was seen to be the source of frustration, exclusion and limited access to public goods and services. Academic literature provided little guidance on how to approach this problem, hence the report finally coined the terms ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ social capital.

2.3. The three faces of *štela*

As the story of Dejan at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, there was an air of mischief with which Bosnian informants looked upon participation in *štela*-system, accompanied with a sense of (internal) pride and (external) embarrassment. The possibility to mobilize *štela* was reciprocal to one's social standing, class and power.

2.3.1. *Štela*-person

Among Bosnians interviewed in 2009 as well as informants in my 2012-2013 research, there was a consensus that "anyone can be a *štela*". It was not necessary to know her personally, as having a mutual acquaintance or someone who has access to that person and can intervene on one's behalf would be seen as sufficient. However, they indicated that the stronger the tie to the *štela*-person, the more one could expect in terms of quality of services that person could provide, and the less immediate the need to reciprocate to this person with services of similar caliber, or in some cases with a monetary payment. Among Bosnians, it was considered to be a matter of tacit knowledge of *who* would be the best person to approach in a medical, educational or any other public service institution – in the words of one of the participants of the 2009 survey, it "only took a little bit of asking around."

"Every parent would do that for their child": The role of family ties

The obligation that family members felt to provide their offspring and (younger) relatives with access to services was most prominent when it came to setting up employment. The common framing and understanding of such situations was that without connections, it is impossible to get any job. As a participant in the 2009 survey said:

I really don't know... I don't believe that there is anyone who has not at least used some friendships, let alone other things. Every parent will try to find a job for his child if he sees that his child has completed a faculty but is waiting for two years to get a job through the Employment Bureau. Every parent would do that for his child. (male, single, employed, university degree, Sarajevo)

The belief that turning to one's family was the first and safest place to look for employment was present also among the younger generation. At the University of Sarajevo, where I taught between 2008 and 2010, students from the Slavic studies department shared with me their frustration about how they felt they were expected to navigate their studies (i.e. through *mito*, litt. 'bribes,' and *štela*) and the bleak prospects in finding employment without having necessary connections at the job vacancies they intended to apply to.

In the first case, i.e. the necessity to navigate one's studies with the help of parents, relatives and *mito*, students occasionally reflected on the adverse effects. These concerned the deteriorated quality of services that one was expected to receive from graduates who did not pass the necessary exams through their honest efforts, but through *štela*. Dževad, a 26-year old student of Slavic studies (originally from Bihać) shared with me in a reunion meeting in Zlatna Ribica a story of his two cousins, both minority returnees who spent the war years in Germany. As Dževad told me, one of the cousin's father had important connections in the Koševo hospital and, when it came to his son's passing the practical exams, he would call the director of the hospital and ask the price of an

exam. This, according to Dževad, was how this cousin graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, and, again with the intervention of his father, found a place in another public hospital. The other cousin, without family-based *štela* got a job in a rural community health center. Dževad clearly had a lack of trust in people who obtained their education - especially when it comes to the medical career - in this way: "(...) I always tell people 'I would not let him treat me no matter what' (...)"

The role of ethnicity

However, while family and kinship ties played a primary role as a source of *štela*, there were instances in which a connection had to be sought outside of the immediate circles of one's relatives and family. Since the end of the war, the ethnically divided town of Mostar has consisted of two parallel sets of administration and institutions: one on the Bosniak-governed 'East side' and another one the Croat-dominated 'West side'. People from the 'West side' (Bosnian Croats) have a very limited - if any - contact with people from the 'East.' The former front line, Šantićeva street, had in 2012 still born traces and marks of the recent violent conflict between inhabitants, former neighbors, from both parts of the town. Academic literature and research on peace-building initiatives and post-conflict resolution (Kappler and Richmond 2011; Paris and Sisk 2009) highlights the role that ethnicity plays in organization of public and private life in post-war Bosnia. For Amila, a 34-year NGO-activist, the communication embargo between both parts of the city has been problematic regarding the issues of healthcare. She says that people from the 'East' know that west-side hospital provides better services than the one on the East-side. As her father suffers from a severe heart condition, Amila, her sister and their mother had decided to search for a connection in the cardiology department of the west-side hospital. Through their neighbor, they had succeeded to identify a surgeon working in the 'pink clinic' – as people in Mostar refer to the Croat-side hospital – who was the neighbor's pre-war elementary school classmate. Through this

štela, they succeeded in placing Amila's father there for testing and examinations. After her father was released from the hospital, Amila's family rewarded their neighbors with several bottles of home-made liquor (*rakija*) and an offer to reciprocate their help in the future.

2.3.2. *Štela-act*

As the story of Amila and the excerpt above show, the act of exchange of services and providing access to institutions and connections followed an implicit protocol, which most of my Bosnian informants considered to be a matter of good taste and common knowledge.

Firstly, as we saw in Amila's example, strength of the tie one had towards a *štela*-person inversely correlated with the sense of urgency with which one had to reciprocate. In other words, the looser the relationship between people involved in the act of *štela*, the sooner one who was getting help through *štela* felt she should return the favor or give a significant material or financial gift. Second, there was a scale of favors which one could ask to be set up. The bigger the favor, the more likely it was to reward the *štela*-person financially. Getting a job in a public institution or state-owned company was considered to be a major asset, as it meant being "set for life" without the risk of losing a job and without having to work too much.⁴⁷ Thus, even among closer relatives, a monetary exchange would be involved as a follow up. In the words of a survey participant:

And I say that I know a man who asks for 5000 convertible marks [to secure employment], because he also has to pay some other person [to set it up]. Everyone knows someone like that. But nobody can know of it, of course. We are all (...) doing them a favor and we keep our mouth shut, but we recommend them to others, because we know about them and because that is the only way in which to get a job. (female, married, college, employed, two children, Sarajevo)

⁴⁷ During my fieldwork, people commonly referred to public service jobs as those in which employees 'just drink coffee and do nothing'.

The relationship between the *štela*-act and money was ambiguous. In the 2009 survey, respondents mentioned the growing role of monetary reciprocation to *štela* (“I do not know if it is still possible to return favor with favor”) and money and bribery gradually replacing the role that *štela* was taking in setting up of services (“Money replaces connections because if you go somewhere, to some institution, if you do not know anyone there you give money”).

Similarly, when asked about the difference between *štela* and corruption, most respondents found that boundary problematic (“I do not know how can you separate connections from corruption? How to separate the two? How can someone use connections and not be corrupt? It does not matter if they will give money or a present; that is irrelevant”). A distinction was, nonetheless, drawn between money and material gifts that were offered to the provider of *štela*, and those that were required.

2.3.3. Štela-system

As a system, *štela* was considered to be wide-spread, “God-given” and frustrating to those who felt exclusion from the system based on their lack of connections or the monetary means to mobilize them. The 2009 report detected the pervasiveness of *štela*. *Štela* was found always or sometimes useful in enrolling into school or university by 90.8% of respondents, in obtaining better healthcare by 92.2%, in getting employed (93.7%) and in access to services and authorities by 91% people. As mentioned in Dejan’s narrative, however, in personal interviews the picture of *štela* was less bleak: people did not think of *štela* in categories of moral and immoral, and felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in those cases when they were able to mobilize their connections (“I feel powerful, better, superior”).

The pervasiveness of the *štela*-system and the simultaneous blurring of the public/private boundary can be illustrated by an encounter I had one March morning in a class on Public Policy I taught to my undergraduate students of Political Science. In our Wednesday morning sessions, my twelve students of mixed gender, in their early twenties and of mostly upper middle class background⁴⁸, would bring newspaper excerpts to discuss recent political and economic events in the country from a policy perspective. On that day, I got a short news piece from Adnan, one of the more zealous students in the class. The news article (“Sebija Izetbegović prvoplasirana na listi kandidata za direktora Opće bolnice” 2013) reported on the Steering Board of the Public Hospital ‘Prim. Dr. Abdulah Nakas’ which made the decision to give the highest number of points to the wife of an influential politician, who stood as a candidate for the new director of the hospital. The decision of the committee was made behind closed doors, without participation of the press, even though the Code of conduct of the Steering Committee prescribed that sessions were supposed to be open to the public. The students then started a lively debate. The majority of them were of the opinion that if indeed it was the highly placed politician who orchestrated the selection, it was still justifiable – in the words of the 22-year old Dijana, “it is more important to take care of your family and relatives.” The discussion then twisted towards the consensus among the group, that someone trustworthy (a politician) has the right to place their relative in a public post. For students immersed in the discussion over politicians providing jobs for their relatives and offspring, the *red*⁴⁹, logic of the *štela* -system, was that the public domain is, or can easily become, subject to private interests and manipulation.

⁴⁸ This was a private university where a yearly enrollment cost more than what most families in Sarajevo could afford.

⁴⁹ Brković (2014) in her account of how informality and *veze* were used in providing humanitarian aid in a Bosnian border town speaks of the relationship between *veze* and orderliness. The verb *srediti*, used in Bosnian as a synonym for *našteliti* (litt. 'to set up through *štela*), means simultaneously to 'put in order', coming, as she notes from the root *red*, meaning 'order' (p. 12).

2.3.3.1. *Socializing into the system*

How exactly were the rules of the *štela*-system dispersed? People of all ages that I interviewed or had a casual conversation during years of living in Bosnia seemed to be familiar with the term. Bringing it up in conversations solicited a 'knowing smile' (Ledeneva 2013), a sign of tacit complicity. Informants from the Whistleblowers association, an anti-corruption NGO and one of my fieldwork research sites (cf. Chapter 5), described the *štela*-system as part of the Bosnian 'mental pattern' (*mentalni sklop*) into which members of the society were socialized. In Višnja's account, when I asked her if she remembered the first time she heard the word *štela*, she said it was before the war:

When I was a student, I heard the word even though back then it was not even close to what it means now. Now, without *štela*, without connections, you cannot do anything in this country. From getting employment, to signing up your child for school, (...) it became the system of our living. Because when you have some problem, as this is what became our mental pattern (*mentalni sklop*), when you have some problem, first you think, (...) aha, I have to go to the municipality to finalize something, not important. So, (...) who do I have there, who do I know in the municipality? Nobody just does the most simple thing, which is to go there and get in the line, get to the front desk and do it this way. Everyone first thinks: who do I have there, who could help me out, even if it is a totally simple, legal procedure, like a urbanistic permit. This became our system of life, immediately thinking where do I have whom.

During one of our interviews, I asked Višnja, the founder and co-director of Whistleblowers, an association of people who reported corruption in their workplace, if she had ever been in a life situation when she needed *štela* herself. In this context, she mentioned a situation when her younger son needed to sit for exams to an elite high school (*gimnazija*). Being an excellent pupil in elementary school, he was interested in a mathematical class, where only thirty students were admitted on an annual basis. She eventually did not find a *štela* for him, even though he asked for it, emphasizing the strong pressure that she put on herself while deciding not to: "in that moment, it was a tough decision, but we decided not to do it." As she explains:

He was a child of fourteen years, when he went to the exam and told me: 'mom, can you find some *štela* for me, to get me accepted?' In this moment, I knew it was his dream to enroll in this school, in the mathematical class, and I knew that the school takes three hundred students every year but only thirty for the mathematical class. At the same time, I was breaking down: what I have done [as a whistleblower, reporting corruption in Skenderija], had endangered the life of my children because of some stupid ethics, and they had suffered through this period with me – and now my child is asking me to help him, to find some *štela* for him.

Asked about how children as young as her son got to know about *štela*, Višnja responded that it was generally through exposure to references to the system in a family environment and through peers at school:

Everyone knows that, because small children talk among themselves and they know – my dad knows a director and my mom knows a secretary, they can set it up for me, I don't have to study for the entrance exam, I will be enrolled, I have *štela*, and so on, and so on. Everyone knows that. Children of seven, eight, ten years age know that, this is the way of thinking, as they hear it at school and in comments.

Višnja's experience of how the *štela*-system spread was reminiscent of other whistleblowers' accounts. For some it was something "we are born with," for others a matter of upbringing, expressed in the local saying *s koje sofre jedeš* (lit. 'from which *sofra*⁵⁰ do you eat?'). These culturalist understandings of *štela* were also described as part of the 'phenomenon Bosnia' (*fenomen Bosna*) in which people were not taught to raise their voice and go with the *system*.

2.3.3.2. *Embarrassment and pride*

'System' was in local narratives encompassing of both the formal politico-legal set-up of the country and *štela*. Both were met with a mixture of internal embarrassment and external pride. Fully aware of what it meant to disobey the rules of the 'system,' Višnja expresses both bitterness and embarrassment towards the disregard that people in Bosnia seemed to have for public interest.

⁵⁰ Traditional Turkish table.

Enquiring whether the embarrassment about the use of *štela* came from perceptions of the 'system' being truly unique to Bosnia and different from other systems, another whistleblower, Dženana, responded:

Bosnia is different because of the system of government. This system is present in no other country, neither it is possible to sustain: it is really synthetic, not natural, this level of government, this splinteredness (*rascijepkanost*), this is present in no other country.

On the other hand, narratives of embarrassment mixed with those of pride in getting things done. At the beginning of this chapter, I presented the story of Dejan, whose late aunt 'knew what was best for her' (*znala je za sebe*) and who inspired Dejan not to be a *budala* but to get ahead in navigating the 'system.' Following her example, Dejan described to me a plethora of administrative adventures he had been through with his business and political projects. Some of these had included operating a tourist boat in his Herzegovinian hometown, an ice-cream shop in Sarajevo, an NGO and a political party.

The success of the ice-cream shop, conveniently located on Sarajevo's busiest street Ferhadija, however, had depended on the absence of stalls with miscellaneous *džidža*⁵¹ (knickknacks). One day Dejan got upset about his neighbours' *džidža* stalls expanding further into the street. They were covering and over-shadowing his ice-cream shop, thus depriving him of huge revenues in the high season around the Sarajevo Film Festival:

I see one moves half a meter forward, into the street, then the other does the same. At this point, my shop is totally sneaked in and nobody can pass by (...) So I go to the mayor's office and of course he won't have me and nobody wants to deal with me, then I talk to someone at the urban planning department. They won't hear about it of course, so they play the old trick at me – go to canton, this is not our business. But I know where this leads (...) they will send you around like a potato, so I do something else. My wife's former

⁵¹ As Dejan framed it, these were operating semi-legally, because even though they had never paid an official permit to the city's administration, the municipality knew about her existence and usually closes its eyes to these businesses, considering them a part of welfare to the socially weakest segments of population.

colleague works at another department there so I go to him and he says, 'let me look into it.' So he digs it out, and it is there, legislative from 1996 that nobody has ever used and the police does not know about it even.

According to Dejan, part of the 'system' was a bureaucratic strategy of avoidance: instead of finding appropriate legislation and processing citizens' demand, offices and individual bureaucrats dealt with their requests by transferring citizens either to higher (in this case cantonal) level or simply to other branches of the administration. Dejan had circumvented the 'system' by finding *štela* through his wife's connections. Eventually, he succeeded to have his claims processed, and takes particular pride in doing so. He found this solution elegant, as opposed to the embarrassment that would accompany talking to his *džidža* stall neighbors directly:

That would have been a total *papanluk*, like me arguing with them about centimeters off the street, but what can I do? I can't see my children dying of hunger, I have to know what is best for myself.

By referring to *papanluk*, Dejan uncovered yet another dimension of embarrassment: that of the rural population towards the urban one. Perhaps more pronounced than in other regions, the stigma of *seljak* (peasant) became a normative category with a chain of connotations imposed by the urban population notably throughout the war, where the city of Sarajevo and its spirit were 'invaded' by an exodus from ethnically cleansed villages in the mountains. Infamous for "not knowing how to behave in a city", the peasant brought their cattle and other smaller farm animals with them to empty Sarajevo apartment, attempting to live their life as they did before, much to the despise and disgust of the original population⁵². The category of *seljak* became used as a derogatory offense, often aggravated by *seljačina* (big peasant), denoting those who would not behave in line with the perceived notions of what is cultured (*kulturno*) and normal (*normalno*)⁵³. Considered to be even

⁵² For an account of transformation of urban localities, such as Sarajevo, with the post-war arrival of rural refugees, see Stefansson (2007). For post-war identity shifts and hierarchization, see Armakolas (2007) and Henig (2012).

⁵³ For discussion of the notions of 'normality' in Bosnia during the war, see Maček (2007); and in contemporary Bosnia, see Jansen (2015).

worse offense than a *seljak*, *papak* – and from here the derived noun *papanluk* (papak-dom) would refer to someone who migrated from a village voluntarily, trying to take on the city cultural code of behavior but failing to and thus embarrassing himself even more in the eyes of the urbanites.

Being technically a *papak* (i.e. having moved voluntarily into to Sarajevo from a rural area), Dejan is very careful and sensitive in presenting himself as an urbanite, but the embarrassment he feels towards his roots leak through the facade. In the above-mentioned story of settling down the dispute with his *džidža* stall neighbours, he displays a mixture of pride and embarrassment: pride at being able to navigate the complex administrative system of regulations and permits, not being made a *budala* by the administrators who try to direct him to a higher instance in order to get rid of him, and being able to ‘dig out’ an almost forgotten city regulation that supports his cause; embarrassment, because he is aware that instead of yielding recognition for his street smarts from the community, he might as well be called a *papak*, for making a fuss about a few centimeters to which he managed to shift the stall-owners back, and also for not contacting official channels and not resolving the dispute personally.

2.4. Conclusion

Exploring the local understandings of *štela* and related phenomena served in this chapter to prepare the ground for an investigation of the multiple ways in which local and non-local actors engage in coproduction of informality in state-building. It was shown that informality in Bosnia is not necessarily a by-product of the socialist period; usage of *štela* is deeply engrained in the society and closely associated to notions of 'system' and orderliness. However, it is often met with ambiguous reactions of internal pride and external embarrassment. This chapter thus framed a point of reference for the following engagement with how exactly informality is managed and

negotiated within the international state-building context, through the local and non-local actors' expectations, speech acts, interpretations and encounters (*translating up* and *translating down*).

3. *Štela*, corruption or networking? Informality practices within the OSCE

In every social organization there is a tension between the visible, formal structure and the invisible currents of unwritten rules, informal ties and social etiquette. While the former becomes revealed to newcomers almost instantly, learning the informal rules is a gradual process of organizational socialization. This process may depend on the newcomer's previous social status, position within a given organization, cultural background and other variables. It may involve accepting or refusing a formal work-related identity attached to the position she assumes, as well as informal placement in the social structure of the organization. Gradually, the social setting and adopted identities become so familiar to any insider that navigating them becomes an essential part of performing one's work duties. Organizational ethnographers (Ybema et al. 2009, Shore, Wright and Pero 2011) often highlight the necessity to disentangle from these familiarities and to evoke a sense of 'strangeness' in place of the unquestioned logic of one's ethnographic research site. In this chapter, I embrace both: the familiarity of intra-organizational rumors, grievances and power struggles, as well as the strangeness of taken-for-granted beliefs and normative assumptions.

One of the key demarcations in the life of development and humanitarian missions has been the one between international and local staff. Researchers of the inner dynamics in humanitarian and state-building missions have argued that the 'bifurcation' of these two worlds has contributed to the loss of legitimacy in the contexts of questioned statehood (Lemay-Hebert 2011, Mosse and Lewis 2005). Similarly, analysts of international involvement in Bosnia have written about the way this power dynamic paralyzed ownership of the state-building process (Coles 2007, Gilbert 2008, Stiks 2012, Dzihic and Hamilton 2012). Coles (2007) and Gilbert (2008) wrote on the OSCE

as one of the Dayton-mandated architects of governance in contemporary Bosnia. They have noticed the self-portrayed notions of universalism and disengagement from the ‘local’ life as a value present among most international staff. Studying the social world of the local intermediaries, Barakat and Kapisahovic (2003) describe *lokalci* (the locals) as a new Bosnian social class. Baker (2014) in turn describes them as the privileged ‘projectariat’ coping with constant labor insecurity and precarious life. The international/local binary has been emblematic of the existing power relations in which the ‘internationals’, as holders of an extra-state sovereignty and a more privileged social status, get to decide which practices are in line with the Western neo-liberal democratic ideal. Can we, however, take the ‘internationals’ and ‘locals’ for granted as fixed identity markers? What role do these categories and other existing power structures play in negotiating the boundary between the “formal” and the “informal”? Is there a difference in understanding the relevance attached to the use of personal networks, and a difference in labeling behavior that relies on the usage of personal connections?

My answer to these questions and the key argument of this chapter is the following. Instead of being fixed identity markers, the ‘internationality’ and ‘locality’ of both groups of employees are a matter of social practice. One can be more ‘international,’ one can be more ‘local’ by embodying a set of external characteristics, such as resorting (or not) to the exclusive use of English, engaging in a particular sense of humor, and attending certain venues. Along with these characteristics, employees would embrace ‘internationality’ by framing the use of social connections at the workplace in ethically neutral terms. This ‘interpretive labor’ (Graeber 2012) allowed the ‘international’ to maintain ethical dualism: *what we do* (professionalism, networking, re-hiring) is different from *what they do* (*štela, veze*, corruption, nepotism). On the other hand, ‘locals’ can see no difference between the two groups of practices. To be an ‘international’ in Bosnia of 2012-2013

means for my Bosnian informants to ‘live like a king.’ However, to the ‘locals’, this royal costume was *ko fol* (litt. ‘as if’, cf. chapter 5) collapsing the moral and power distinction between us and them. I found the idea of ‘professionalism’ and framing one’s use of social connections at a workplace in ethically neutral terms became one of the key learned mechanisms through which my informants would gain or assert their status as an ‘international’, disregarding of their nationality.

Methodologically, the chapter is based on three types of material: textual regulations within the organization; ethnographic field notes from conversations in informal settings, such as over coffee, lunch or after hours; and semi-structured interviews. Since talking openly about informality and perceived practices in the organization requires a significant level of trust and openness to the researcher, observations in the second part of the chapter are based on on-going interactions with my nearest colleagues at the Head Office, Community Engagement Section, and employees I got into closer contact with either via work-related cooperation or informal channels. This group of informants represents a mix of both ‘internationals’ and ‘locals’, seconded and contracted staff, consultants and interns, Head Office and Field Office employees, which were categories that organized the social life within the Mission in emic terms⁵⁴.

There was a difference in the ethnographic material I collected *inside* and *outside* of the organization. In encounters that took place far away from the office, in a relaxed environment of one of the many Sarajevo coffeeshops, restaurants and gyms, colleagues had no problem to assign the labels of *štela* and corruption. However, it was more intricate to access their understanding of

⁵⁴ It is important to point out here the inevitable: a lot of what came up in these lunch, corridor and in-between-meetings conversations could be seen as an overt exposure of negativity and venting of everyday frustrations.

networks *inside* of the organization, the way they were used, and the way such use was perceived, understood and labeled as a certain type of behavior. This is understandable, as asking a direct question about a *štela*-related behavior in a recorded interview would be futile (as one could assume and as I could confirm having done such experiment on a few occasions), especially in the case of interviewees who saw their future with the organization. Thus, the staff's reflections on the use of networks and perceptions of such use came out usually in an informal setting, in a gym lounge, in a bar, and preferably outside of the rigid environment of the UNITIC towers.

The organizational ethnography of 'informality' and 'internationality' in Bosnia proceeds as follows. The first section problematizes the concept of 'international community' in Bosnia. The following section provides a historical, organizational and spatial background of the OSCE. The formal institutional layout, types of contracts and rules of the organization present the 'tip of the iceberg' and set the scene for interactions and processes described in this and the following chapter. The following section takes the reader directly backstage and gives voice to groups of actors who identify as 'international', 'local' and 'in-between.' The aim of this section is to explore their self-labeling practices in the light of how these actors refer to the use of social connections within and outside of the Mission. The next section addresses the types of 'informal practices' that the participants referred to and engage in, along with their normative labeling by the 'internationals' and 'locals'. The final section of the chapter illustrates the effects of this process on cohesion, trust and effectiveness within the microcosm of the Community Engagement Section during the difficult times of the 2012 mission downsizing.

3.1. 'International community': *contradictio in adjecto*?

The 'international community' became a monolithic term describing a plethora of international agencies operating of post-conflict or humanitarian contexts. However, only rarely have scholars

(Coles 2007; Gilbert 2008; Deacon and Stubbs 1998; Lendvai and Stubbs 2007, 2011) looked *inside* of this entity to see the inner dynamics and components within the ‘international’: neither have these organizations operated in a vacuum and lack of interaction with the local ground, nor have they been composed or represented solely by the expatriate staff. Gilbert (2008: 18) had portrayed the international/local binary as a juxtaposition of “external, cosmopolitan, apolitical, neutral” and “mono-ethnic, political, biased, and always positioned). Gilbert points out the morally superior self-portrayal of the foreign actors within Bosnia, who, as part of the ‘international community’ portrayed themselves above the ‘state’ and the ‘domestic society.’ The position of local employees and identities in-between is, however, no less interesting, for the way international projects were formulated and implemented on the ground largely depended on the pool of Bosnian staff members who served as the buffer zone, contact point and often as filter of the Bosnian reality.

In his analysis of the state-building policies that the OSCE and other members of ‘international community’ exercised, Gilbert (2007) argues that the source of legitimacy for the OSCE was the opposition between what the internationals rendered as “universal/ neutral/ impartial” and the “particular/ cultural/ political”. In his view of the processes and politics of minority return management in post-war Bosnia, he sees the role that the ‘international community’ decided to take on as an embodiment of the presumed universality of a specific type of world order. In this paradigm, one group of actors, called the international community, exercises its power to reframe societal patterns and relationships as “cultural” (in a chain of meanings, leading to the notions of ‘particularist’ and ‘personal’) rather than as political (cf. chapter 4).

On the other hand, internationals’ own self-portrayal as ‘neutral’ and ‘impartial’ also gave them the right not to engage with messy history and politics (Gilbert 2007). Lack of knowledge, disengagement, or even ignorance gained value as indicators of an appropriate,

democratic/democratizing standpoint towards the country and its inhabitants. Within the imaginary scale of authority (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) in which ‘state’ always sits above ‘civil society’, the ‘international community’ assumed a position that was higher than the state.

In this vein, Jansen (2007) and Helms (2013) go further in considering the word connection of ‘international’ and ‘community’ as not reflective of the lived reality of the foreign, mostly Euro-American, employees of ‘foreign intervention agencies’ (Jansen 2006). This point more accurately reflects the ‘foreignness’ of these actors and debunks the assumption that members of ‘international community’ existed in a vacuum, detached from their ‘local’ environment. Similarly, Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings (2007) made the point that the term ‘international community’ implied an air of benevolence on these actors, and helped them to reinforce the Bosnian ‘quasi-protectorate’ in which certain ideas and practices were, through ‘implementation strategies’ and ‘monitoring mechanisms’ imposed on problematic local practices. While in the following I deal with one particular foreign intervention agency, the OSCE, I use the term ‘international community’ as well as the derived adjective ‘international’ as an emic term used by English-speaking participants as identity markers and referents of their life situation.

3.2. The OSCE in Bosnia: Historical background and the Dayton mandate

The OSCE is an organizational offspring of the 1973 agreement on the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Growing into the current organizational layout was an on-going process that involved expansion of the original cold-war objectives of the Helsinki agreement. This process culminated in the early 1990’s, when the international organizations began to explore the scope of their capacities in the light of their new role in post-Cold war Europe.

The wars accompanying the secession of Yugoslavia often were described as a laboratory and a testing ground for NATO, EC and CSCE, when some of their representatives started to assume the roles and functions of the Yugoslav state (Woodward 1995, Rieff 1996). The OSCE was formally established at the end of the war in Bosnia, in 1995, and within the architecture of humanitarian, development and security organizations that were adjusting their terms of reference in that period, embraced the concept of ‘comprehensive security’ (Davidson 2005). This meant the simultaneous focus on three areas: the politico-military domain, the economic and the human or humanitarian area⁵⁵.

The influence of the ‘international community’ over socio-political reality in post-war Bosnia led some to think of the country as an international protectorate (Chandler 1999, Knaus and Martin 2003) or to criticize the post-colonial nature in which power and autonomy were taken away from the Bosnian citizenry and elites. Authors writing on this period (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007; Chandler 2000, 2002, 2006; Coles 2007) often point out there were far too many actors, and a lack of clear agenda and coordination, thus resulting in unnecessary duplication of efforts.

Constitutionally, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina was established and encoded in the Dayton Agreement (further referred to as the GFA, General Framework Agreement) on 8 December 1995. The GFA specified that the OSCE would be the institution to take part in the external efforts to assure ‘stabilization’, ‘democratization’, and ‘peace implementation’. In terms of task division between NATO, OHR and the EU, the OSCE had three broadly defined areas of competence: regional stabilization, elections and human rights. Regional stabilization (Annex 1-

⁵⁵ For securitization of the OSCE, see Merlingen and Ostrauskaite (2004, 2005).

B, Articles II, IV, and V), referred to confidence-building measures, arms control, and most recently, reform of defense and the military sector. The second area of competence, elections (Annex 3) was at the beginning fulfilled by conducting the (1996 and 1997) elections on behalf of the local government. Later, however, this segment entitled the OSCE to carry out a range of political and democratization activities, including political party and civil society development, media monitoring, voter education, supporting women in politics, and ‘good governance.’ The powers allocated by Dayton agreement to the OSCE in the article were far-reaching: it had the authority to ‘adopt and put in place an election programme.’ Further, the OSCE was meant to ‘supervise, in a manner to be determined by the OSCE (...) the preparation and conduct of elections’ (GFA).

Finally, the human rights component (Annex 6) entitled the OSCE and other intergovernmental or regional human rights missions or organizations to “monitor closely the human rights situation (...) including through the establishment of local offices and the assignment of observers, rapporteurs, or other relevant persons on a permanent or mission-by-mission basis and to provide them with full and effective facilitation, assistance and access” (GFA 1995, Annex 6, XIII, paras 2&3). The OSCE was directly involved in appointing the Human Rights Ombudsman (by the chair of the OSCE) and receiving reports of the Human Rights Chamber.

The case of Bosnia was unique in that the extent of involvement in domestic affairs of the country far exceeded OSCE’s capacity implemented in other countries of Eastern Europe⁵⁶. While the Dayton agreement provided limited guidance for understanding the extent of international mandates, and their indefinite extension in 1997, these were further interpreted and re-interpreted

⁵⁶ See Chandler (2000) and Campbell (1998) for a critique of the way the international institutions over-interpreted and encroached on additional areas of responsibility within the vaguely defined terms of reference.

by the actors themselves. However, the way the OSCE approached the fulfillment of its mandate was parallel to the evolution of the general framework and approaches to post-conflict peace-building reconstructions. Initially, post-war elections formed the cornerstone of the OSCE's work, reflecting the emphasis on electoralism in democratization discourse (cf. chapter 4). In the first post-war years, the leadership of the organization came to the conclusion that running elections was not in and of itself a safe road to democracy. At this point, civil society assistance, local government reform and overall institution-building became equally necessary.

Both Coles (2007) and Gilbert (2008), who observed the inner life of the mission at the turn of the 2000's, point out the unusual and to a certain extent experimental nature of the work that the OSCE was doing in Bosnia. For example, Gilbert (p. 127) recalls the first US ambassador to the OSCE as saying that Bosnia was an 'excellent laboratory' in which the organization was to be tested (OSCE MiBH 2005: 23). The size of the organization grew from four people in December of 1995 (Coles 2007), to a staff of nearly nine hundred a few months later, to stable numbers of six hundred staff in the mid-2000's, and started to decrease only after 2010.

3.3. Organizational structure

The OSCE has been exceptional among international agencies present in Bosnia for various mandate- and structure-related reasons. As discussed above, the vague wording of the mandate left room for taking liberties with its interpretation, encroachment and expansion of initial terms of references. It also led to a dubious reputation that the OSCE gained among the foreign staff of other organizations and embassies present in the country. At dinner events and receptions during my fieldwork, skepticism towards its mission was more or less tacitly overlooked, even though on

several occasions, diplomats would make an impromptu joke in the presence of OSCE staff. The infamous reading of the OSCE abbreviation as the ‘organization for sipping coffee in Europe’ became notorious across field missions in the Balkans. One day a 28-year old foreign diplomat of Czech origin, Martina, complained to me of her reception at the house of the Czech Ambassador, whose disdain for the organization came out already at their initial meeting. Talking to the embassy personnel, the newly arrived Martina quickly gained the impression that “apparently everyone thinks we do everything and nothing, and change our mind all the time (...)” (field notes, 18th March 2013), an impression, as she soon found out, that was shared across the diplomatic landscape in Sarajevo.

“Changing our mind” was institutionally reflected also in almost constant organizational flux. Since its inception, the OSCE had been subject to heavy re-structuring. The two major organizational changes that affected staff and program funding occurred in 2002 and 2009. In 2002, the former Election Department, where Coles (2007) conducted her ethnography of electoral democratization, changed its focus to education. Reflecting on this process, interviewees I talked to about this change remained blatantly dismissive about why and how the change of portfolio from Elections to Education had occurred. As Peter, a young political analyst from Belgium, once reflected on it, this change seemed to him as completely arbitrary and untimely, as the OSCE at the time had limited human resources and expertise in educational matters.

Unlike the emergence of the Education Department, which was initiated by the Mission and communicated towards the Secretariat in Vienna, the second major shift was imposed on all field missions in 2009. As of 2010, the previous pillar-based system was reduced to two dimensions, accompanied by logistics and operations units. Military aspects of the OSCE’s mandate were from then on carried out by the Politico-Military Dimension (referred to by its function as Security Co-

operation in fig. 2). The civilian matters, broadly divided into democratization and human rights, were taken care of by the Human Dimension (see fig. 2 below).

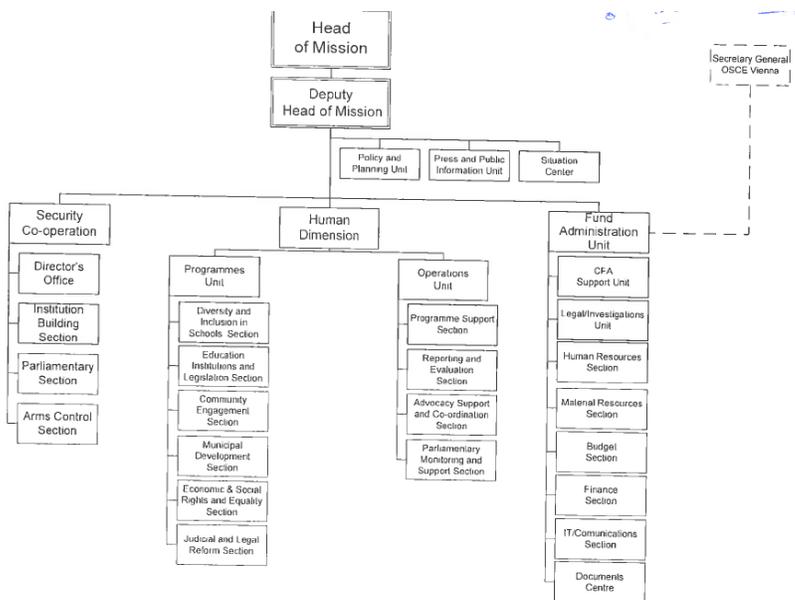


Fig. 2 – OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Organizational Structure 2010-2012

Spatially, the OSCE Mission occupied four floors of one of the UNITIC skyscrapers (*UNITIK-ovi neboderi*) in the neighborhood of Marindvor. Prior to the war, these twin towers were the symbol of Yugoslav prosperity and brotherhood among nations, referred to in an endearing way as Momo and Uzeir⁵⁷. During the war, they became part of the war-torn landscape, with Momo (tower A)

⁵⁷ “Momo” and “Uzeir” were stage names for Rudi Alvađ and Rejhan Demirdžić, a popular comedy team famous throughout Yugoslavia for their radio shows in the 1970s and 1980s.

losing several floors at the top and both ‘brothers’ remaining windowless until 1996 (Maček, 2007). Shortly after the war, UNITIC was reconstructed and became the seat of several international agencies, the press and a metaphor for the ‘high politics carried out from the glass tower’, as Alida Vračić, head of Populari think tank, put it in our interview (08-12-2011). Located on the 18th floor was the headquarters of the OSCE, office of the Head of Mission, Deputy Head of Mission, and Policy and Planning Unit. In office jargon, ‘going to the 18th floor’ or simply ‘going up’ meant going to a high level meeting where decisions on staff, budget and programs were made. Each section and unit, with the exception of the Press and Public Information Unit, was headed by foreign personnel, seconded by a national government. The procedure of secondment meant that an incumbent for a given position had to initially apply through her Ministry of Foreign Affairs who carried out the interviewing and nomination to the following rounds. In terms of secondments, the maximum time a given individual was allowed to serve for the OSCE was seven years. Technically, these staff members were part of the diplomatic body present in the Mission. All seconded staff members were on one-year renewable contracts. Non-seconded international employees, or ‘consultants,’ were contract holders hired either within a Special Service Agreement (SSA), that related to a task-oriented delivery of an evaluation or project item, or Short Term Assignment (STA), often referred to as the ‘junior consultancy’, available to be assigned for a maximum of six months within a given calendar year (OSCE Staff regulations, internal document). It was expected that these people would fluctuate more frequently. The ‘locals’ were directly hired in Bosnia and also served on one-year renewable basis.

Field presence

Among the organizations in Bosnia, OSCE representatives prided themselves on the Mission’s extensive field presence. Unlike the EU, UNDP and OHR, which only had offices in Sarajevo and

Banja Luka (one exception was the UNDP Upper Drina development project in Foča, 2008-2010), the OSCE operated in fourteen field offices across the country (see Fig. 2 below). The administrative structure within the Field Offices copied the one of the headquarters: the Head of Field Office would be an international seconded diplomat, who was directing a staff of approximately twenty employees within programmatic and logistic units. Program units were presided over by an international program officer, accompanied by a national program officer from Bosnia and one or two local assistants. Not all programs were represented in all of the field offices. In 2012-2013, for example, the Community Engagement Section, ran programs only in nine of the Field Offices.

Communication between Field Offices and the Head Office was formalized in terms of weekly reports and the Official Mission Bi-Weekly, in which officers from the Head Office digested most of the important events and briefed them in a five to seven page report circulated to all of the mission employees every other Monday morning. Apart from this channel, regular and all staff meetings were held on a section-programmatic basis, in mountain resorts in Jahorina, Bjelašnica, or on the seaside in Neum.

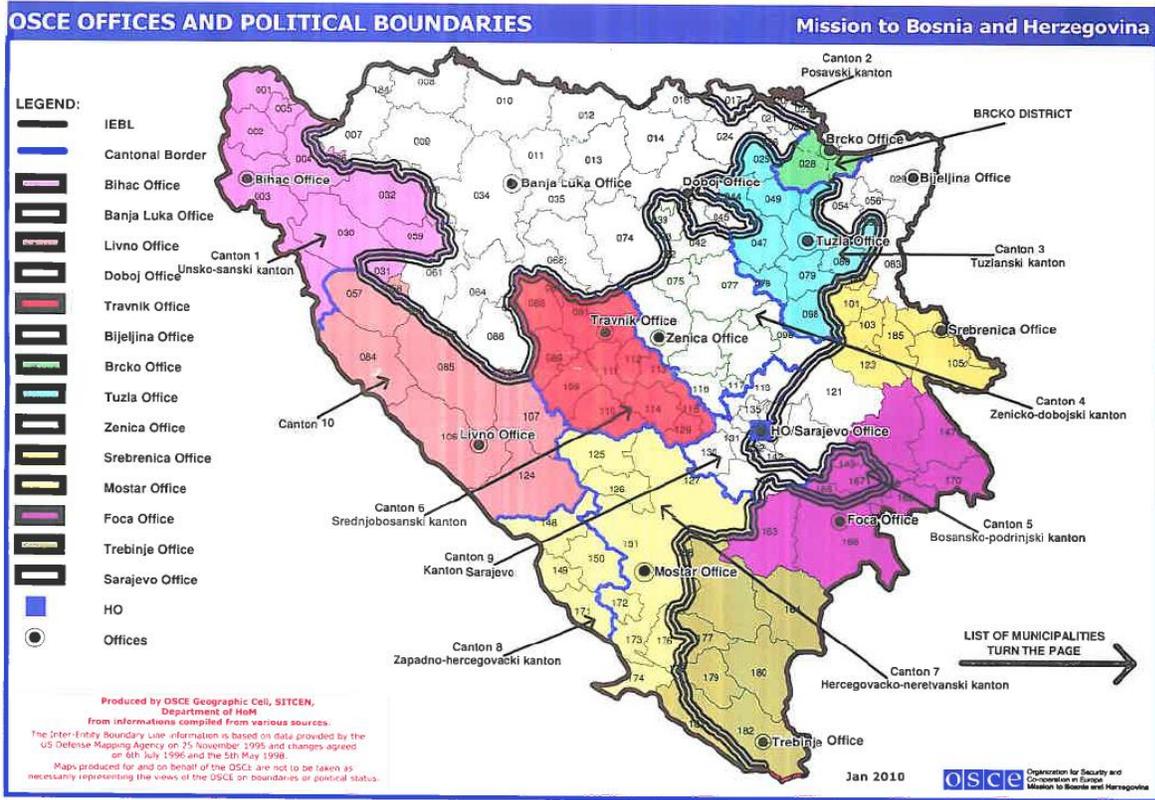


Fig. 3 – OSCE Field offices and political boundaries

3.4. Informal divisions and identities

While the formal organizational structure clearly played a role in how projects were carried out, informal identities and divisions within the organization were no less important. Despite the dichotomising assumptions of earlier literature on international missions (Lemay-Heber 2011, Gilbert 2007), the identities within the mission were based not only on the binary division of ‘international’ and ‘local’, but on the more nuanced categorization ‘in-between’. These identities were marked by power influencing practices within the organization and the way some of these informal practices were labeled either as ‘networking’, ‘corruption’ or *štela*. The normative labeling of these practices corresponded to the identities, which became most clear in the case of practices and rituals that surrounded extension of contracts, employment and entry to the

organization. These instances are described in section 5 on employment practices, focusing on the generic rules and patterns, as well as on instances when some of these were brought up under unusual circumstances, such as during the mission ‘downsizing’ that marked most of staff numbers during 2012 and 2013.

Throughout my time with the OSCE and throughout informal conversations and interviews, it became obvious that inside the Mission, just like outside of it, the social world of the interlocutors was indeed organized into two parts – the ‘local’ and the ‘international.’ While on the outside, all the representatives of the Mission acted out the ‘international community’, the inner divisions and their contestation had an immense impact on the everyday life within the organization as well as on its encounter with the world outside (cf. chapter 4). The way one became ‘local’ or ‘international’ within the organization often depended on characteristics other than place of birth or origin.

3.4.1. Being ‘local’: Locality, ethnicity and nationality inside the Mission

The category of ‘local’ referred to all employees born in Bosnia and Herzegovina or holding a passport of one of the former Yugoslav republics. In the context of identity politics in Bosnia, the ‘locals’ could be formally Bosniac (Muslim), Croat or Serb. Mirroring the importance this division had in non-international community, national identity played a role for logistics staff (drivers, security and technical support). While in the headquarters of Sarajevo the Bosniac population prevailed, the Mission informally abided by the “national key”⁵⁸ when it came to local positions. This labelling was pronounced in situations in which a certain nationality was openly needed.

⁵⁸ The term “national key” refers to ethnic quotas instituted by the Dayton Agreement to distribute power between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs in the country. A similar mechanism existed also in socialist Yugoslavia – for an account of socialist Bosnia and the “national key”, see Pearson (2015).

At the beginning of my engagement as a participant observer in May 2012, eighty employees of the mission were asked to join their counterparts in Kosovo to help conduct and observe the Kosovar elections. Members of the CES team applied as well, as such projects typically meant a generous *per diem* (known as “DSAs”, abbreviation for ‘daily subsistence allowance’), travel expenses and the opportunity to get away from the tedious desk work at the office. Out of the CES team, Miroslav, one of the two ethnic Serbs, got selected and departed for a three-day escape. Upon his return, he shared his impressions with Matea and myself over coffee in UNITIC. Three buses had left from the Sarajevo-based HQ on a chilly Friday morning, coming back on Sunday. Miroslav seemed struck by the resemblance of the way the international section managers segregated the Bosnian team by ethnicity to ‘ethnic cleansing’ during the war: “They did not ask us anything, nobody looked at our *lična* (ID) or passport, they just took a list of names on the bus and separated us by name. Those with Bosniak-sounding name (*muslimansko prezime*) were sent to Pristina and the rest of us, Serbs, Croats, were sent to Mitrovica, where the situation was more heated.”

Employees’ surnames were not always the safest indicator of ‘local’ ethnicity, as the organization tended to attract a large pool of people with mixed background, who found it difficult to blend in both the public and private sector in the country, operating almost exclusively with the ethnic key. Among the logistics staff, drivers were one such example in which the national denomination and versatility offered by mixed background came to good use. The following excerpt demonstrates one such example:

On the long and windy road through Herzegovinian vineyard, I talk with driver Franjo who defines himself as Croat and catholic in Sarajevo. He speaks about his difficulties of finding a job in Sarajevo in this position – prior to war he worked as a traffic policeman but continuation was not possible due to blackmailing by colleagues of other religions. He explains that with the OSCE it is an unwritten rule that drivers of a certain ethnicity or with

a 'more convenient name' travel to destinations where they would not have problems. There is a certain amount of Serbian drivers, he says, and they go to the RS. He himself usually has the opportunity to choose whether to go to Central Bosnia or Herzegovina. (Fieldnotes, 13-11-2012)

Seventeen years after the war, the reasons for which OSCE drivers of a certain ethnic background were sent to certain locations were pragmatic: having the "right name" would get them in less trouble if they travelled into "their" ethnic majority area. Sometimes there was also a chance that they would know or have an informal connection with somebody in authority, thus in case of confrontation with either the police or governmental forces, they could navigate the situation in an easier way or possibly mobilize a *štela* to get out of harm's way. Such was the case one November morning, when Zico, a driver of nominally Serbian origin, drove me to Srebrenica (RS) for a meeting. Knowing already that his job would be cut as a part of the 2012-13 downsizing, Zico drove perhaps a bit more carelessly than usual. Shortly after we passed Sarajevo, the police stopped us for inspection. In a few sentences, Zico convinced the policeman that he worked for the police prior to the war and, dropping a few references to show that in fact they have a common acquaintance at the Pale station. In a few minutes, we were free to go.

3.4.2. "Running the *raj* of Bosnia": Internationality, power and privilege

The social category of 'international' referred to a group of foreign employees on seconded or contracted positions. As an emic category, 'international' was constructed both by the international and local staff as imbued with superior power and privilege, with an air of importance and exclusiveness of the cosmopolitan lifestyle of a humanitarian or development aid worker. Local employees, however, often vocalized cynicism at the lack of expertise and legitimacy on behalf of their (younger) international counterparts. The Bosnian equivalent for 'internationals' was *stranci*

(lit. foreigners, strangers), a term that simply reflected the fact of foreignness of these employees, without any air of exclusiveness or superiority⁵⁹.

The way internationality was constructed shared some similarities with the early 2000's when Coles (2007) did her ethnography at the Mission. At the time, however, the international employees still maintained the air of working in a humanitarian environment: many of them came for a short-term election supervision mission, and saw the large scale destruction that affected the country as they drove out of Sarajevo headquarters to field offices and polling stations. Being in Bosnia five to seven years after the war, at the peak of international investment and awareness for the mistakes caused by war-time inertia, still required a certain level of expertise and brought with it an air of emergency and crisis intervention. Coles remembers that in 2000-2003, when she did her fieldwork, some internationals would arrive to the country with nothing more than a Swiss knife, hand sanitizer, heavy-duty windbreaker and a pair of army-style boots. Ten years later, Bosnia changed its meaning on the international CV from the "make you or break you" locality to a "baby destination", as some of my international coworkers formulated it. Bosnia as a "baby destination" was an epitome for both the relative safety and quality of (expatriate) life and the perceived practice among members of diplomatic mission. It was a matter of tacit knowledge and corridor chit-chat among both the international and local staff members, that foreign diplomats would send their children for an internship to the OSCE, UNDP or the EU departments in the hope of earning some months of experience in the safe backwaters which still rang a bell in the international humanitarian, development and diplomatic world (fieldnotes, 6-5-2012). Internships

⁵⁹ Two long-term residents of Sarajevo – Jim Marshall, photographer and activist, and Tim Clancy, Bosnia guidebook author and environmentalist – had coined the term *BoStranci* (amalgamated from *Bosanci* – 'Bosnians' and *stranci*) as a self-identification label for Western expatriates who lived long enough in the country to learn the local language, get settled and often start families there.

were increasingly hard to get, at least through formal application channels, due to heightened demand and overall mission downsizing (see section 3.5.1.).

As opposed to the times of Coles' (2007) stay with the Mission, during my fieldwork I found that the idea of expertise based on foreignness embittered many of the non-international staff with years of practice and degrees from renown universities, who were experiencing a glass ceiling when it came to advancing their careers in the Mission, getting an authority over projects, or deciding on budgets. According to the formal organizational structure of Head Office and Field Offices, each programmatic or geographic unit was led by an international assisted by a team of two to seven locals. In Field Offices, this would typically create a dynamic in which a twenty-something year old international with minimum working experience and a limited knowledge of the local ground became responsible for a group of local co-workers in their forties to fifties, who lived in the given locality most of their lives, and some of whom also had earned equal or higher education degrees abroad.

During my fieldwork, this was the situation in most of the field office that served for Community Engagement Section. In Mostar, Sandra from Portugal was a twenty-six year old international Program Officer for the CES section in Mostar. She came to Bosnia a year and a half prior to that as a fresh graduate from a British University, in order to join her partner who had a work engagement for the Mission in Foča. Through his networks, she first found an unpaid internship with the local UNDP Upper Drina Development Project in Foča, and after that started a job with the OSCE. In Travnik, the twenty-seven year old New Zealander, Sarah, became the supervisor of three Travnik-born employees in their mid- to late forties. Both Sandra and Sarah embodied the international/local divide in their attire, attitude towards Bosnians and their language. Learning Bosnian (or – “local” as the political correctness-aware internationals liked to phrase it) was not a

part of the *savoir-vivre* amongst internationals, it was not encouraged among the foreign staff and the use of English was required even in situations when no international was directly involved in a conversation. On such occasions, when one local employee turned to another in Bosnian, Sandra would have the habit of immediately addressing the two of them in her native Portuguese, in order to make them switch to English. At a team meeting for all of the Community Engagement Section we had at Jahorina, I would overhear two local co-workers⁶⁰ commenting on her attitude as arrogant and patronizing, while to the international management, Sandra came across as strong, competent and able to manage the difficult Mostar team despite her young age.

3.4.3. Facades of the ‘pretending we are doing well’ strategy

The issue of dramatic differences in salaries and consequent difference in lifestyles and life quality was felt and expressed by local co-workers. In 2008, the first shopping mall was built in the epicenter of Sarajevo, in Maršala Tita road just opposite *Veliki park* (Big park), replacing the ruined building of Sarajka. Since then, three other shopping malls opened in the center of Sarajevo, all in the radius of fifty meters from UNITIC, the OSCE headquarters⁶¹. Goods that were on sale in these shops were out of reach for those on an average Bosnian income, and inaccessible for most ‘local’ employees. Yet, status symbols became a part of ‘pretending we are doing well’ strategy to keep up with the ‘internationals’ as they saw them. In our frequent corridor and lunch chats, Matea and Amira criticized the hypocrisy of those Bosnian counterparts, who would rather “eat beans the whole month but still buy the newest cellphone”. According to them, it was important to keep up appearances, the external façade, the form, while the contents and “reality”

⁶⁰ Fieldnotes from a team meeting in Jahorina for all members of the CES Section, held 3-6 June 2012.

⁶¹ In 2011, it was Altavista, familiarly referred to as ‘Alta’, that opened in a building just next to UNITIC, catering with its cafes and shops to the employee population from the twin towers. In 2012, Importanne opened its gates to the neighboring UN headquarters. Another shopping mall across the street from Alta had been under construction since 2009.

were only secondary. In this context, many of the local women employed at the Mission internalized the need to look well, be seen at the right places which the internationals could afford. When the expatriate females made it a habit to go for facial and massage treatments to the newly opened spa and wellness center in Hotel Central, a significant percentage of local women joined them, despite the center's price list that catered to the international salary rather than the marginally lower local pay check.

These discrepancies were aptly formulated in one of the recorded interviews I made with my co-worker Senad, who used post-colonial terms when referring to contemporary Bosnia⁶²:

[T]here is a ... very clear divide between the international and the local staff. There is. I mean, you cannot help yourself but you must notice the division, looking at the facts. For example, my immediate supervisor is my junior respect to anything, education, work experience, influence, connections, legitimacy through work in the local communities. And yet, there is gap, in funds, I mean in salary, in social standing, so to speak. (...) I'm a local, [the internationals] are the imperial, they are running the raj of India with little compassion. You can see that the expats are huddled together, and the locals together. There are two communities. There is mingling, but it is very peripheral. But when it comes to the substantial, the nature of the task assigned is that the international expatriate staff is running the show. So of course they are in a better advantage when it comes to reciprocity, assigning who stays, who leaves. (13-12-2012)

Sensitive to what the internationals can afford in their country and locals cannot, colleagues who would relate to me as *naša* (one of us, literally, ours) sometimes mentioned instances when an 'international' would be surprised that they, too, could afford something. Shortly after the May 2012 Jahorina meeting, Amira shared with me that she, her husband and their little daughter got as a gift from their diaspora relative tickets to an especially expensive opera performance at the National Theater. The opening night, as she said, was crowded with diplomatic staff from embassies and missions. She mentioned several people from the OSCE who also showed up,

⁶² As a former academic and head of one of the local think tanks, Senad was possibly alluring to the Knaus and Martin (2003) article 'Travailles of the European Raj.'

including Sandra, who allegedly expressed her astonishment with an arrogant intonation that Amira imitated while telling me about the encounter: “oh, you are also here?”

Veličković (2003) in his fictional parody of the international-local relations in contemporary Bosnia, *Sahib: Impressions from Depression*, suggests that part of being an international entailed being dismissive and distrustful of the local population. One Hungarian colleague, Gyorgy, followed what seemed to be the typical career trajectory within OSCE, referred to as the axis of “Kosovar periphery – Pristina – Bosnian periphery – Sarajevo” (fieldnotes, conversation with Gyorgy, 14-7-2012). The Bosnian periphery location, meant usually one hardship duty station, such as the heavily traumatized Srebrenica or ethnically cleansed Foča, followed by one easier office, the sun-lit Trebinje close to Dubrovnik, or Travnik with a commuting distance to Sarajevo. Gyorgy, who had served in hardship missions prior to his engagement in the Balkans, was high-positioned enough to skip the Bosnian periphery, and landed a job in Sarajevo immediately. During his almost two years with the Mission, he turned forty, went through a mid-life crisis and happily departed to an EU mission in Palestine, though never became happy or content in the Bosnian capital. “It is the people,” he would say, comparing Bosnians to allegedly much more friendlier Kosovars, “they just don’t mean well.” He would report to me instances when he got cheated by a local taxi driver, or a serviceman who was fixing his entrance door and charged him more than he would charge a local customer. For Gyorgy it did not matter that his salary was more than ten times higher than the average Bosnian salary; it was a matter of honesty and honest treatment, which he found lacking in the hostile Bosnian environment.

Using more subtle language, my local co-worker Matea, National Officer for Social Inclusion at the CES, who became my closest friend in the office, brought up the issue of local-international divide on several occasions. Matea was the youngest person in the office, a woman and, in times

of general confusion about the mission's and section's *raison d'être*, possibly the most dedicated and hard-working team member. She was promoted to headquarters from an office in Zenica and worked mostly on issues of gender. Only during my second trimester at the institution did she open up and share with me her frustration about the role that identities played in career growth and overall working of the institution. On a rainy day in mid-November 2012, as we walked together from headquarters to Mediacentar, a local NGO working in media analyses and human rights, the subject came up as we talked about her future and career possibilities within and after OSCE (fieldnotes, 16-11-2012). Unlike Senad who complained of the Bosnian *raj*, she seemed to believe it is possible to counter the power influence of 'internationals' through obtaining a degree. She felt she would legitimize herself and make her authority higher in the eyes of her international managers, if she pursued another Master's degree or perhaps a PhD from a Western university⁶³:

(...) Matea told me how truly annoying it is for local staff members to just be constantly faced with the influx of young international career officers, fresh graduates with very limited experience, who find themselves immediately in positions of power and status. (...) At the same time, she thinks the barriers and tensions are manifold: not just the internationals versus locals but also interns and consultants versus senior and seconded staff, various nationalities, as well as head office versus field office.

Matea, as well as other local informants at the Mission, perceived the OSCE structure like a pyramid: the 'internationals' at the top and below them local employees. She perceived this model to be unfair and unreflective of the merits and experience of those 'locals' who had similar educational backgrounds from Western universities and decades of work experience in Bosnia, yet were reporting to fresh graduates. She saw the possibility to obtain another post-graduate degree

⁶³ One of which was, at the time, the university where I did my doctoral studies. While still not having the reputation of universities geographically located in the West, Central European University was considered by nationals of ex-Yugoslav countries as the closest available 'almost-Western' education. I attribute part of Matea's initial interest and trust in me to the fact that she herself was interested in studying at the CEU.

at a more respected university as a way to embrace internationality not as a marker of identity and foreign origin, but as a marker of power and status.

3.4.4. In-between categories: Fluidity and aspirations

The binary of international versus local, as described above, worked on three main assumptions. The first assumption was that ultimately, everybody strived to be ‘international’ in order to enjoy the privilege and authority, and lack of access to this position brings about frustration among those who are stuck as ‘locals’. The second assumption was that ‘locality’ remained firmly fixed to post-Dayton boundaries of the Bosnian state. The third assumption was that being ‘local’ meant holding Bosnian citizenship, disregarding any other additional citizenships a person could hold at the same time. Within the Mission, some employees evaded the binary by not meeting at least one of these assumptions. The following representations illustrate the three ways the dichotomy was avoided by people who did not see themselves neatly in either of the two ‘worlds’: ‘internationals’ who became *naš* or *naša* through having soaked up enough Bosnian language and culture to understand and integrate with the locals, and ‘locals’ whose background was either mixed from other parts of former Yugoslavia or who, as returnee diaspora, held both Bosnian and a Western country’s citizenship.

3.4.4.1. Goran: ‘International in my own country’

Goran is a 27-year old “wonderchild”, as people in the office referred to him, born in Croatia to Serbian parents, and later raised in Šibenik. As a former student leader, he worked his way into OSCE without formal education. Shortly after finishing high school, he had landed a job with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Serbia. He left the job after his trial period was over in half year, discontented about alleged corruption and misuse of organizational resources: “the corruption there was so obvious and I was so pissed with it. Nobody spoke English, cars were used for private

purposes. In the end they told me I have to work six or seven months on minimum salary, because of political context, so anyway I left.” (Interview 3-12-2012) Afterwards, he started a series of short engagements with ODIHR and OSCE. His longest assignment, in Field Office Trebinje, took two years and catapulted him to become an assistant in the Sarajevo headquarters. Being skilled in navigating the world and life of ‘internationals’, Goran made himself indispensable to running the local ODIHR office. At the birthday party of his girlfriend, the seconded Policy and Planning Unit international officer from Armenia, Goran opened up about the way informality works in the mission, in consultancy contract assignments, in the system of SSA (Special Service Agreement) assignments and also in his personal experience: “[b]ack in Bosnia, I applied for several positions, and everyone was saying oh, this person is a supervisor for this position and this person is a supervisor for that position and maybe I should take that person out for coffee. I mean, this is how you get a job in OSCE.”

However, despite seeing how networks and informality work in the mission, he was proud to be a part of it and proudly embraced the status of ‘international’ that goes with it. Speaking of his initial posting with the OSCE, in Trebinje, he admitted that while many people applied for the job and he was the youngest among them, “everyone on the panel who sat there knew me, I worked in the democratization department before, interview was there, a person from OSCE was there, that’s it. I was told this job was not for me, there was someone else pre-destined for it, but then I got it.” Goran had no remorse in associating internationality with professionalism and with a healthy dose of what he sees as the necessary level of networking:

And then I came to her [to Andrea, who opened a vacancy for an assistant at the time] and asked, I didn’t know you are looking for somebody, and she [said], well, I didn’t know you are looking for a job, if I knew you were looking for a job, I would offer you a job. And then I (...) didn’t realize that it is very important that you walk around and tell these people you are without a job, so it’s not *štela*, it’s not corruption, it’s networking: sometimes

people just need to know you are searching for a job. And it makes perfect sense, if people don't see you around... So from that perspective networks and connections do play a role in our work, it's absolutely natural. (Interview, 3-12-2012)

Similar to many 'locals' working in higher positions within the Mission, Goran portrays himself as part of the world of 'internationals': "I really feel like an international in my own country," he mentioned during our lunch time recorded interview (3-12-2012). For him, internationality did not embody just the foreign passport and international origin, but primarily a certain attitude, position and *savoir vivre*, as well as the transience and temporality of international life: "I'm in a fantastic position now, with this two-year contract. This is fantastic, (...) nobody has this here. Plus I really love the lifestyle, going for dinners, the sarcastic, cynical humor [of the internationals], and I mean, I know that one day this will be over (...)." Goran's English was impeccable and his networks among senior internationals wide. Being a frequent guest at house parties, charming and witty companion, Goran escaped from 'local parochialism' through his networks to the world of international professionals.

3.4.4.2. *Naša Janine: Not a 'proper international'*

Within two years of joining the Mission, thirty-one year old Janine worked her way up the organizational ladder from an intern to Head of Field Office Srebrenica. In her view, both nationality and *štela* played a role in her career promotions. Despite the typical fast-track career growth of the 'internationals' (as opposed to the real or perceived 'glass ceiling' for the 'locals'), neither she nor her environment considered her to be one of them. Originally from the US, she had spent four years volunteering and working in Bosnia prior to joining the Mission. After earning her college degree in Chinese language and Theater studies at Princeton, she worked and lived in China briefly and then became involved with a voluntary U.S. organization. She came to Mostar as a volunteer for the cultural center Abrašević in December 2007, and started to learn Bosnian

immediately. This center was located on the former front line in the conflict, the Aleksa Šantića street. Within the constraints of the ethnically divided city of Mostar, the ‘OKC Abrašević’ was thought of as an alternative, liberal space for artist expression, free of ethno-national divisions. Coming as a Christian volunteer supported by a religious organization, it took time for Janine to blend in, and to be accepted and appreciated at the center. After three years, she perfected the language with all its subtle nuances and colloquial forms. When her contract expired, she started to work for a local TV station – an experience that was, according to her, set up through *štela*:

When I was in Mostar working for RTV Mostar, working as an editor, I was desperate to work for this TV station, I wanted them to hire me, my friends’ father was highly placed, he is in the Croat political circles, he called the owner of the TV station, telling him that this girl is very important for them, they did not pay anything, but he just made it happen, he was very kind. I didn’t ask him, they really offered, they were saying ‘you *deserve* this job’. Another time, when I wanted to work for the FTV, he himself offered that he would call again, and I had to almost beg them not to do it, not to worry about it.

After not being paid by the TV station for three months of work, Janine resigned and was looking for a job in Sarajevo, ready to leave Herzegovina. As a volunteer in Abrašević, she had learnt about film-making, knew how to handle camera and saw herself in this sector. However, the lack of job opportunities and not being able to compete with ‘locals’ on the local job market led her to send several applications to the international organizations headquartered in Sarajevo. There, she complained about the difficulties in applying from outside for the lowest position in the OSCE, the unpaid internship. Having obtained a job in the organization after a year of futile attempts with what she describes as “luck and *štela*”, she became the rare international with previous long-term experience in Bosnia, having mastered the Bosnian language and acquired a large pool of Bosnian friends. This was very unusual to ‘proper internationals’ who seldom mingled with locals.

After six months of internship and six months of consultancy, Janine was fast tracked into the post of a Human Rights Officer, a seconded position in the Srebrenica Field Office. Even though she has not spent more than few weeks in Great Britain in her life, because of her mother, who is English, Janine holds British citizenship. Within the Mission, this means access to contracts reserved for British nationals. As Janine mentions (knowing it is a matter of fact familiar to the rest of department), this is practical because fewer Brits apply in the Mission and because this way her compatriot superior had a chance to vouch for her with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who have to formally nominate her for a secondment. However, to her local co-workers, she is not a “proper international” as at most meetings she attempts to speak Bosnian. This, as she notices, confuses her co-workers and puts her to a position of lower power and privilege: “So when I speak Bosnian, everyone is correcting my grammar and since I’m not fluent, it maybe does not come across as decisive enough.. also the fact that I hang out with locals does not help.” (fieldnotes, 13-5-2013) Janine notices that speaking and acting Bosnian does not help advance her status among peers – instead of earning respect for language skills and efforts, she says, many of her co-workers say that she is not a real international, she is *naša* (ours in Bosnian). Then, she says, they often literally overlook her in the office, disregard her ideas and treat her “maybe even worse than as a Bosnian.” (fieldnotes, 13-5-2013)

Unlike other ‘internationals’, Janine often got self-reflective of her privileged position as a foreigner in the country. She had started a blog where she compared her life to the one of a local friend who, despite having a university degree from a Bosnian university, worked in a tobacco-selling kiosk.

The ‘not-quite’ internationality of Janine and a handful of other foreigners who have lived in the country long enough to become *naši*, disrupts the easy division lines built up between the worlds

of the locals and internationals. As she narrates to me once over a coffee in UNITIC, her local colleagues always try to find a way to force her into the known social category: “when I went to a meeting with the mayor, they always ask you if you need an interpreter, even if it’s obvious that you don’t. So I rejected initially, but then my local co-worker came to me and said that I should take someone with me, that it will not look good if I speak Bosnian with the mayor. So, I always feel a bit fake, playing this international who has not been around and speaks only English.” In Janine’s case, similar to Goran’s, it was not the nationality or place of origin that made them act out “locality” or “internationality”, but rather their self-presentation, lifestyle and language in which they chose to operate.

3.5. Practices of employment and employment of ‘practices’ inside the Mission

All budgetary contracts within the Mission were given and renewed on a yearly basis, for all categories of staff. For seconded staff, the formal rule specified a maximum time of Mission service as seven years for the lifetime of an employee. This included work in any head or field office of the organization. All other categories of staff did not have an upper limit of service, and many of them, especially local staff, were staying until their position expired. It was a common practice not to open an existing position for a new recruitment procedure, but to retain the current personnel. Reactions to this on behalf of local staff were quite equanimous. Goran, who was one of the few exceptions as his contract was ‘extra-budgetary’ and termed for two years, once commented that “nobody has a longer perspective than one year. I’m not thinking about it. If I think constantly I will lose my job by the end of the year, I will be mental, then I would not work for this organization anymore.”

Despite the termed contracts given out to most members of the Mission, it was virtually impossible to lose a job based on merit or unsatisfactory work results. During my time with the CES, its head,

Andrea, was looking for ways to get rid of several local co-workers, ‘the rotten apples in the basket’, as she put it. Mission downsizing came as a welcome opportunity which allowed her to not extend a number of positions within the section. Mission employees, however, would not lose a job unexpectedly even in case of severe downsizing. The unwritten code of conduct had it that contract renewals, due at the end of each calendar year, were announced in the middle of the year: “of course OSCE will not sack anyone the last day, if you lose your job, you will find out by the mid-year” (Goran, interview 3-12-2012). The perspective that OSCE will close down one day and that everyone will have to look for a new employment still sounded like too distant a future to most of the people involved. It was rather dissatisfaction with the nature of their job that made some of my local colleagues talk about future, possibilities and plan for life “after OSCE.”

Studying organizational processes is always a time-sensitive activity, especially so in the case of an organization whose purpose is to eventually cease its operations. The OSCE had been involved in state-building and democratization processes in Bosnia since 1995 and its efforts, at least on paper, have been to build up a stable environment in which international assistance would be no longer needed. In this sense, Mission staff members were aware of the fact that sooner or later they would have to look for a new employer. During my time with the Mission, this distant future was, however, only scarcely mentioned.

3.5.1. Internationals, morality and social connections

In terms of career advancement, my local colleagues expected that ‘hanging out with the right people helps’ and those right people are usually the ‘internationals.’ This came up during many of my conversations with local co-workers. My closest co-workers at the CES headquarters, Matea and Amira, would often tease me about spending way too much time with the ‘locals’: “You know, the only thing we can do for you, is we can go for lunch or we can find you a husband (...) but if

you need a job, you have to hang out with the internationals.” (Fieldnotes, 21-6-2012) On a different occasion, Amira would give me accounts in which local employees got far by hanging out with the internationals. She never mentioned the word *štela*, nor implied that she would evaluate such behaviour in any categorical or normative terms. It was just how things got done.

Conversations I had had at the beginning of my stay with the organization showed that local co-workers saw a very clear divide between *štela* and networking. For example, the first CES staff assistant Aida would suggest that networking is about knowing someone with qualifications and just recommending them for the job. In international circles getting a job through connections is still a matter of networking – to her it seemed more innocent. On the other hand, *štela*, as she saw it, “is about incompetent people getting those jobs.” (Fieldnotes, 8-5-2012) The following day, when we came to the same topic with both Aida and Matea, the dividing line did not seem so clear to them. We continued this conversation with her and Matea over lunch, where Matea pointed out that many of the OSCE interns, for example, and people who gained access to work in international organizations are those who were born to families of diplomats so that in this respect, she would see no difference between the two worlds and the concepts of networking and *štela* (fieldnotes, 9-5-2012).

‘Networking’, as grasped by Matea, Amira and other local co-workers, was portrayed as a benign practice, carried out by the ‘professional’ international staff and representative of the developed ‘West’. On the other hand, *štela* would refer to a backward practice, connected to the notions of shared embarrassment and an intimate cultural knowledge (Herzfeld, 1997). This boundary was also firmly defended by the internationals. The unquestionable ethics of ‘networking’ involved: identifying project partners, terms of reference, project proposals and other work-related issues

during more or less exclusive receptions, after hours drinks, intervening on behalf of colleagues of the same nationality, or providing internship positions to the offspring of their private networks.

This was questioned only in highly informal settings. On one such occasion, at a birthday party of Goran's girlfriend in Barhana, a cozy Bašćaršija bar catered to both local and international clientele, Goran shared his impressions from the way that informality works at the Mission. As most section bosses have in their authority the assignment of SSA's (Special Service Assignment) through connections where often there is no recruitment process or just a pro-forma one in which it is clear that people who are friends with section bosses get the assignment (Fieldnotes 16-10-2012). Another perceived strategy of how informal connections slip into the picture are, in Goran's terms "intransparent ToR's". These are formulated in a way that leaves a lot of room for interpretation and no clear benchmark on what it is that the consultant is actually supposed to deliver. "Usually they write something like, help with producing this or that report – either you produce it or not, what is this 'help with'?" Later in the evening, when the atmosphere loosens up, he mentions he could give me "thousands of examples of *štela*", continuing with an example of a project on Roma inclusion, that was on-going at the time, and in which, to his allegations, SSA consultants were all people who were "just on good terms with the project manager (*dobri sa šefom*)". Speaking in Bosnian, in a relaxed evening setting of Barhana, wearing his 'local' hat, Goran allowed himself to be critical of the as if - *ko fol* - approach that the internationals, too, took to state-building and democratization projects in Bosnia.

On a different occasion, when I interviewed Goran on record, he was more cautious about bringing up these issues. He also tried to portray himself in a morally spotless way. He dismissed both *štela* and some of the local employees requests for *štela*- or connection- seeking in the organization – when he spoke dismissively, it was the local stuff that he criticized:

For example, just a couple of days ago, I was approached by a driver. He said, let's go and have a coffee. This is a person I know, we are not friends, we say hi to each other. So I said 'ok.' This is the first time we were meeting for coffee. So we are sitting and talking and then he says "oh, I have lost my job" and I [responded that] I'm really sorry. He said: 'I'm so fed up. They abused me. Other drivers are using their cars for private purposes. This is completely against the rules. I never did that. They have private jobs, private companies, I don't have any companies, and I lost my job. I know you are a good friend of Roger. Could you go to Roger, say some good word for me? Maybe he can see to this decision.' And I'm (...) shocked. Because obviously, this is something that people in the mission do, they use their contacts to get something that they want. So I said: 'I'm sorry, I'm not such a good friend of Roger's. I know Roger, he was my boss. We went out couple of times for drinks. But this is it, this is where the story ends.' And the second is, (...) if you have a problem and you have an interview, the first office to complain is the chief of personnel. She is the first person to do this. (14-12-2012)

The more formal, recorded interview setting in physical proximity of the office may have inhibited Goran to express more freely his opinions about how social connections were used at the mission. His iteration that it is obvious that connections are used and moral resignation that 'this is what people do' is counter balanced by dismissal of *štela*-seeking behaviour of a local driver who in his narrative seeks access in order to keep his job through Goran's connection to Roger.

Former employees are naturally more open about the way they see the use of informal connections affecting the working of the Mission. Anne-Sophie, a twenty-seven year old French national, was a vivacious, extroverted go-getter: she had been a very active volunteer in Mostar and Sarajevo with a very impressive track record of sustainable projects for youth. Since I knew that she was very actively looking for a way to get into a 'serious international organization', I had recommended to the head of the CES, who at the time was complaining of "all these applications [for internship] on the desk, and not knowing which [of the applicants] are any good" to take a look at her resume. Shortly after that, Anne-Sophie started her internship.

Reflecting on how she and other colleagues continued employment in the mission, Anne-Sophie hints at another well-known, yet seldom spoke about practice, the 'fake recruitment procedure' (in

local circles known as the *ko fol*⁶⁴ procedure) in which a formal recruitment procedure is run despite the fact that a candidate is informally already known for the place:

Well, there is a test and an interview. That was a pretty transparent process. On the other hand, my interview was not that transparent. When I moved from an intern to a consultant, I had to apply and be interviewed, for transparency reasons. They claim it is the culture, everything has to be transparent (...) but even in the recruitment of their own staff, it is kind of shady how these things actually go (...) I was kind of in doubt and they could have gotten straight for me and for [another person], qualification-wise, they had people who were more qualified, but we had the advantage of already being in (...). So, it is possible that other people applied but we were already in and with retrospect, it is kind of clear that the position was ‘ours.’ (1-11-2012)

Conversations with Aida, the Section Assistant, in May 2012 showed that these principles were widely known and tacitly expected also among candidates for positions. “I do get calls from people applying for positions, asking me, is this a real or fake vacancy? And the truth is, in most of the cases, we already know the person who is going to get the job” (fieldnotes, 16-5-2012) Since many contracted positions for local and international employees involved larger documentation, including letters of recommendation, applicants wanted to avoid making an unnecessary effort.

These practices were part of what my informants on several occasions framed as ‘internal politics’ within the Mission. The perception among junior staff members was that there were people within national staff that one needs to know. Discussing how employment works on the local level with Anne-Sophie, she hypothesized that “there is *štela* going on, on national basis (...) but I don’t know by who. There are certainly some *mahalušas*⁶⁵ within the departments, especially in the admin section. People try to be good with them, because they are in the position to decide on their

⁶⁴ For role of the *ko fol* interpretive filter in state-building, see chapter 5.

⁶⁵ Bosnian term for a neighborhood gossip, a lady who knows everything about everyone and likes to share the information, from a Turkish word *mahalla* (for related concept of *mahalanje* as a spreading information through grapevine see chapter 4).

future employment. There is national head of security and national head of HR (admin staff) and these people have access to senior management meetings, so they have a direct access to the information and sometimes have the power to push forward their candidate.” (field notes 1-11-2012) On another occasion, sipping coffee in my living room across the street from UNITIC towers, Anne-Sophie shared with me her experience of how *štela* works on the international level:

Among the internationals, the politics is more about the country you come from. For example, there was this British high official who came to my office every now and then and said things like: ‘what are you still doing here? How much am I paying for you?’ Meanwhile, he would drop by my British colleagues who were interns at the time [like Janine, the not-quite international] and both were from nearby his hometown. He would try to encourage them to apply for open seconded positions, making sure that they could count on his support in the process. So I think, among the internationals, it is all very much based on national basis – some senior officials sort of favor employees or colleagues from their countries.” (fieldnotes, 2-12-2012)

Regarding what Anne-Sophie framed as the “whole intern culture”, with internships being perceived as the gateway to the organization and thus to a serious employment in an international mission, the perceived practice was that young graduates were being hired based on connection of their parents or on potential career advancement they can bring to certain individuals. “You would recruit an intern even if you didn’t really need an intern because it came from your boss or because his father is in high position in your field of expertise. For instance, there was a case when an intern’s application came with a letter from a highly placed official saying ‘this girl needs to get an internship ASAP.’ When these young interns got access to short term employment with the OSCE, it opened doors to their future career. Often times, these kids do not care at all and are doing far from a fantastic job. But once the door to these agencies is open, it helps them kick start their international career. (...) Of course, younger people try to meet for coffee with the more senior ones, always.”

Apart from internship allocations, which were criticized among all categories of staff, ‘favoritism’ was a concept that resonated strongly with internationals, reflecting on job allocations and contract extensions among their peers.

The seemingly most transparent case were seconded positions. According to people in the OSCE, these were least prone to informal manipulation on the Mission level, simply because nominations for seconded candidates went through and had to be approved on the national level at the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Even in these cases, however, a “higher level of politics” as Anne-Sophie once put it, was possible. Talking of a common acquaintance of ours, the daughter of a senior diplomat who got seconded to the mission through the French ministry (fieldnotes, 2-11-2012). Having strong ties to the ministry of foreign affairs, she managed to put forth a secondment for her daughter even though the French did not second until that moment. According to Anne-Sophie, what mattered was that heads of missions tried to put in people of their nationality. It would mean more involvement for their country.

Among the local respondents, awareness of these practices resonated with bitterness over the unequal access to privilege, power and merit-based career advance. The following is an excerpt from a recorded interview with Senad (27-11-2012), dated approximately one month after he heard the news that his position would be cut, subject to mission downsizing the following year. That day, Senad shared a lot about his frustrations about the creative practice of ‘ToR⁶⁶ manipulation’, and the role that networks play in the organization in order to have things arranged formally:

(...) I applied for this position, the National Policy Officer and was really convinced that despite the rumors, the OSCE is the OSCE. [I thought] there will be no bending of the rules, so I applied for the position. Produced my CV, application letter. And then they told me this position is already pre-destined for some other person. Basically what happened,

⁶⁶ Abbreviation, terms of reference

the position used to be seconded, which meant it was a person that was assigned for this duty. It was an American person, who was on this job straight for seven years. Because of the rules, rules of the OSCE, this person cannot work for longer than seven years. But this person is a good friend of all the big guys... and girls. (...) So what they did, they designed a way to keep this person in after seven years for less money (...). This American person also has a Bosnian citizenship, so they 'nationalized' the position, they made a public call for proposals. And then somebody told me, I don't stand a chance, despite having the best CV probably in the mission. Of course what happened at the end, this person was selected. They never gave me any feedback on why this happened.

Similar practices got criticized among international colleagues as well. Gyorgy, whom I often met after hours in one of the expat gyms in Hotel Central, complained about the "nepotism, favouritism that goes on, for example in hiring and re-hiring of people's acquaintances" (fieldnotes, 3-12-2012). To describe this, he used the Hungarian expression *a mi kutyank kolyke* (lit. "our dog's puppy"): a metaphor for senior officials who become close to certain team members either through national affiliation or through spending leisure time together. As he explained later on that month:

I mean, this is the practice, you just hire the people that you know, that worked with you earlier. It is more convenient, and of course the higher positioned you are, the less people question your decisions. We tend to prefer internal hiring and to a certain extent it is unfair – it is about re-hiring of people that are already on staff. In a way it is a question of ethics, how and what we implement, what is our internal message. (...) It might have an unfair, long-term negative effect. I don't see a lot what is happening among the locals, as I am not a witness to their hiring practices, but among the internationals, there is a lot of that. It sometimes depends on the chairmanship, also... of course, the participatory states always push forward their own candidates. That is a widely shared, accepted practice. (20-12-2012)

Similarly to Janine's and Anne-Sophie's account of the role of nationality in allocation of jobs, Gyorgy very openly mentioned instances in which favouritism, in his words, gets reproduced on a national basis. Gyorgy opened up later during our conversation, and it was apparent there was a lot on his mind that he would like to share, while fiercely refuting that employment at the Mission is merit-based:

For example, today I talked to a colleague who is Italian. I can suggest to him a person who would be suitable for this job, but the practice goes, there are already two Italians, and

that would be too much. So there is this paternalistic approach – at one hand you push forward your nationals but then you also have to care if not too many people are already in. Everyone is protecting their own nationality, regardless of merit. So there is this pathetic mental state – this is an issue, pretending that this organization is based on merit. But I don't think employment here is merit-based. When you have an interview for an international position, usually there are three committee members, one is from the HR, one is the one who hires, one is on from another section, the neutral one. It is so obvious that he who hires can push his will. This is unfair.. I mean, it is twisted, it is unclear. You can see some nationalities getting upper hand.

Gyorgy's references to 'paternalism' and 'pathetic mental state' of covering up and sugar-coating the reality of what is going on at the mission resonate with how Senad, Janine and Anne-Sophie depict their situation. However, his narrative points at possibly another, hidden level, of competition and 'politics' in the mission and among internationals: the gap between the 'internationals' from Western Europe and the ones from former socialist countries, who were not so strongly represented at the mission.

Figure 4 summarizes, in emic terms, the most frequent practices of informality that were mentioned by international and local informants.

Int'l → int'l	Int'l → local	Local → int'l	Local → local
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “fake recruitment procedure” - networking - private networks- /friendship-based favoritism - “our dog's puppy” (<i>a mi kutyank kolyke,</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Internal politics” - <i>mahalušas/ mahalanje</i> - got their jobs through connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “fake recruitment procedure” - protecting your own - internship management - unclear ToR's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>veze, štela</i> - connections

<p>Hungarian expression)</p> <p>- nationality-based favouritism</p>		<p>- consultancy mismanagement</p> <p>- manipulation with national/international contracting</p>	
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Fig. 4 – Perceived practices of informality, emic terms

3.5.2. Mission downsizing

In the previous sections, I have offered a close look into the general practices of informality and perceived practices of informality during my stay with the mission in 2012-2013. The following contextualizes these practices in a year in which a significant part of the personnel (eighty employees) were about to lose their jobs due to staff cuts prescribed by the Vienna headquarters. This situation not only highlighted the existing level of informality and rumors, but also brought to light a new level of backstage machinations and ‘internal politics’.

Reductions of staff were no exception to the OSCE, the biggest expansion occurred in post-war years and since 2000 the numbers of staff were stagnating and in slow decline. Since May 2012, when I entered the organization, my co-workers and other mission members were discussing the upcoming staff reductions, which would take effect at the end of the year. By June, it was already clear that it would mostly be members of the FAO team (drivers, receptionists) who would go, as well as assistants of the Community Engagement Section and Municipal Development Section. In the end, down-sizing affected eighty employees of the mission: half of them in technical and logistics positions, and the other half within the Community Engagement Section, where ninety percent of the Program Assistants in Field Offices were cut.

Fear of losing a job and uncertainty unleashed emotions and triggered hypothesizing in the corridors. Commenting on this in one of our interviews, Senad told me that “I find it fascinating the amount of rumors (...) the intensity [of the rumors related to the mission down-sizing] was so fierce, I was really shocked, that people are really talking about everything in parallel with the official communication.” As mostly local staff members would be affected, hypotheses were made around the criteria on which cuts would be made, the extent and of course personal preferences, *ko je sa kime dobar*. It is no surprise that this period heightened the practices described in an earlier section, accompanied by some behind the scenes manipulations: “This creates a very bad vibe. A lot of people are pissed, a lot of people feel that they are damaged, that some harm was done to them, a lot of people are saying we were not good friends with the bosses so for these people everyone is to blame” (Goran, interview, 2-12-2012).

Local and international staff members differed in their understanding of how fair or legitimated the cuts were. While Senad shared with me his perceptions of unfairness (see above), Goran opined that “OSCE is not a humanitarian organization or a welfare center and as such, it needs to rightsize”, as described earlier, he also found the way in which the cuts were carried out as “human and just”:

I think that this process was fantastic. I think it was very open, very transparent, I think it was very nice from the mission that they organized training for the staff, (...) I must admit it was very professional. Of course it is not fantastic that these people lose their job, not just for the people but for the country, people lose their monthly salary. These people were spending their money here, it is immediately reflected in the GDP of the country. But when it comes to the organization process the OSCE was very efficient and these people (...) will be phased out very properly. (...) [T]he trainings that they received, the certificates that they got, [they] also cost a lot, it is very nice from the OSCE’s side to do that. The OSCE did not have any obligation towards them. Our contracts expire at the end of the

year, the OSCE is not even required to say it so long in advance, the OSCE can say on the thirty first, you're not coming to work tomorrow.

My co-workers at the Community Engagement Section from the beginning knew our section would be among the most affected ones. Rumors and expectations about who was going to lose their job were changing throughout the months as the official strategy of mission down-sizing was revealed only later in the summer. Within the closest circle of my interlocutors at the Head Office, two Program Assistants' and two National Program Officers' positions were going to be reduced into one. This created a lot of tension in both the Head and Field Offices, and frustration on the part of the 'reduced' staff members. At the beginning of my stay in May 2012, my closest colleague Matea revealed to me that at that point, nobody knew if CEs would exist at all next year and how many people would lose their jobs. This state of affairs had, according to her, a tremendous paralyzing effect on the Field Offices (fieldnotes, 7-5-2012).

Elephant in the room

A month and a half later, at the CES Planning and Review meeting in the tourist resort of the Jahorina mountain, no official news was revealed (fieldnotes, 26-6-2012). While most of the Field and Head Office staff members came with expectations to hear about their professional and personal futures, the meeting focused on brainstorming ideas for programmatic activities for the next year. To symbolize and empathize with the level of insecurity among all attendees, Andrea opened her presentation by drawing a big elephant on the white board. As she discussed this gesture with Matea in car on our way to the mountains, I knew the elephant on the board was both a sign of protest towards the internal pressure to withhold information from employees, and of solidarity with the soon-to-be affected CES team. At the meeting it was still unclear how many team members would have to leave. Only at the end of July it became clear that within the Head

Office, two National Program Officers would be cut and in Field Offices all Assistant positions. Only one Assistant position would be kept at the Head Office.

The two affected National Program Officers at the Head Office were Senad and Miroslav. In the case of Miroslav, this came as no surprise to him and to his closest colleagues. In informal conversations, Andrea mentioned he was one of the ‘rotten apples in the basket.’ Unable to pick her team based on merit, the composition of the section she inherited from her Italian predecessor did not fit her vision of a young and dynamic team, and since becoming the Head of the Section in 2009, she was trying to change it. Frustrated with the lack of formal channels, she searched for alternative solutions. Miroslav seemed tacitly to sabotage her efforts and project ideas by spending as little time in the office as possible, not showing up, not giving any input and not sharing his knowledge of local counterparts, which was recognized by other mission members as quite impressive. Unable to get rid of him, Andrea would look for unpaid international interns to do his work. One of them was also Anne-Sophie, who was an intern and gradually a consultant in the two consecutive years from 2010 to 2012. The 2012 downsizing offered an opportunity to finally get rid of him.

In case of Senad, the situation was more complicated. He was initially hired by Andrea from the position of a very influential academic think tank. Being charming, coming up with ideas, visions and concepts, he convinced the young head of section that under his guidance, the idea of ‘watchdogs’ would turn into a revolutionary success story. Soon after he joined the mission, a series of mysterious illnesses and absences due to ‘family reasons’ occurred, with Matea and Amira often complaining about having to do his work. “He is a visionary, not fit for administrative

work; this environment is not for him,” I would hear Andrea say, excusing the poorer than expected performance Senad was giving.

While Senad and Miroslav were not surprised, if grossly frustrated, at the senior management’s decision, reduction of the two program assistants at Head Offices turned out to be much more dramatic. Among nine assistants of the section, both in the field and in the head offices, only one was to retain their position as the official assistant located in head office. The two assistants at head office, thirty-year old Adnan and thirty-four year old Nela, expected that one of them would keep their job, as they had most expertise in head office politics and administration. It was an open secret that neither of them were engaged or enthusiastic about their work at the Section. Based on the few conversations I had had with Adnan, he fulfilled his job duties just by minimum intervention and was completing his legal degree at work hours on the side. Nela spent time with other national employees and enjoyed the income from her OSCE position as an addition to her family business in the hills of Višnjik. An internal process involved a knowledge test and an interview by a panel of three international senior staff members. Eventually, none of them retained their job, but a third assistant, Darko, program assistant from the Brčko office, kept his job.

On occasions, I would overhear Adnan and Nela expressing support to the other and hoping that “if I leave, at least you will retain your job” (*barem ćeš ti zadržati posao*). The fact that neither of them was finally selected by the committee, they interpreted as an act of personal revenge and favoritism on the part of Andrea. A day after the decision was made, they filed a legal procedure at a more senior level. The reason why Nela and Adnan publicly displayed distrust, anger and contempt on the management’s decision, can partially be understood as Jansen's (2007) “blanket perception of ‘the foreigners’ as arrogant at worst or ignorant at best.” In the situational context, however, it is important to realize that the whole downsizing process and managerial decisions

were considered random, arbitrary, and, most importantly, unfair – they were *ko fol*. Through this filter, Nela, Adnan and other local staff members, saw downsizing as a way for the foreigners to get rid of them, and while having singled out one candidate that would keep their job, keeping the others in anxiety and humiliation in what was perceived as essentially a fake (*ko fol*) recruitment procedure.

The positions of the remaining soon-to-be-dismissed assistants varied. On a drive from Tuzla to Kalesija, I met Najda, a vibrant assistant in her early fifties with impeccable English, who served the Mission for the past eight years. By the time I met her, she knew already she would be one of the eighty released OSCE employees. During our drive in a Mission vehicle, she shared with me her hopes and beliefs for the future (fieldnotes, 4-11-2012), saying that she had given the organization as much as she could. “Naturally, in times like these, I would not give a notice myself, but since it has happened, I see it as an opportunity to move on with my life and try something new in Tuzla.” She decided not to participate in the “awkward dynamics” as she described the situation in which all the field assistants applied for the one remaining post in head office. “I did not want to steal a position from someone else,” she concluded, implying that the means with which the struggle to retain a job with the OSCE was a matter of ‘internal politics’ rather than merit.

During conversations with Field Officers in Tuzla, Bihać, Mostar and Srebrenica (fieldnotes, 4-11-2012, 6-6-2012, 23-11-2012, 25-11-2012), it became obvious that local officers remained dissatisfied with the Potemkin transparency of the selection and downsizing procedure. They resented that the organization tried to create a sense of transparency and objective measures, yet, believed the way these were carried out left a lot of room for personal judgment: while candidates for the one remaining positions were asked about hypothetical scenarios, the evaluation of their

answers left a lot of room for subjective judgment and ‘unnecessary speculations’ as Jana, national program officer in Bihać (fieldnotes, 6-6-2012) put it.

The downsizing process, on-going from May 2012 to end of the year, provided a context in which the conflicting, ambiguous identities, processes and power dynamics in the Mission became heightened and revealed. The insecurity highlighted first of all the lack of trust and communication barrier between the international management and local employees. In this period, it also became clear that there were expectations that only networks and knowing the ‘right kind of people’ truly decides on the employees' professional future and these expectations were handled differently on the part of the international and the local staff. Finally, the period of downsizing magnified the effects of the *ko fol* filter (elaborated further in chapter 5), through which local staff perceived most managerial decisions as unfair, fake and orchestrated.

3.6. Conclusion

Researchers dealing with the inner logics of international missions in humanitarian or development contexts (cf. Mosse 2005, 2006, 2011, Wedel 2000, Lemay-Hebert 2011) have previously noticed the hidden part of the iceberg that gets omitted in evaluation reports and policy analyses of implementation rates. For example, in his ethnography of expert knowledge in international development, Mosse (2011: 56) writes of the paradox between appearances and realities in the professional life of his informants: “[aid] professionals do have to engage in the messy, emotion-laden practical work of dealing with relationships and contingency (...). [T]hey have to negotiate identity, gender, age, race or nationality, not to mention personal security, loneliness, family relations and stress – issues hardly attended to in the literature – while shoring up their motivations within the moral-ethical or religious frameworks that remain private. And yet, as experts and professionals, they have to make themselves bearers of context-free ‘travelling rationalities’ and

transferable skills.” This chapter touched upon relations, expectations and conflicting narratives hidden behind the façade of ‘professionalism.’ It showed that practices and perceptions of informality were an important aspect of organizing the inner life of the Mission. The way relations of informality were framed within the Mission was part of embracing ‘internationality’ by the employees. I showed that ‘internationality’ and ‘locality’ as positions of power, privilege and lack thereof were not constructed solely on adherence to a certain nationality and foreignness, but rather on self-portrayal, self-representation, status symbols, such as language use, lifestyle, humor, and last but not least embodiment of the culture of ‘professionalism’ which sanctified use of personal networks to advance one’s career as the ethically neutral or benign practice of ‘networking.’ As the following chapters illuminate, this dynamic had an important effect on communication of meanings towards the local partner organizations of the OSCE (*translating down*), and from these partner organizations back to the Mission (*translating up*).

4. 'Translating down': Informality in local community management

In the previous chapter, I brought together the concepts of informality, internationality, power and privilege within the OSCE Mission. Through an ethnographic study of the power relations among foreigners and Bosnians in the Mission, I explored the ways in which some social relations became interpreted and shaped as 'networking' and others as *štela* or corruption. This chapter complements the previous one with an analysis of the interactions between the agency and their local counterparts and exploring the colliding expectations, democratization rationales and state-building narratives from both sides of the international-local divide. The vantage point from which I was able to observe projects within the Community Engagement Section (hereafter referred to as the Section) was 'Local Communities' - a portfolio on revitalization of the MZs (*mjesne zajednice*, lit. local communities). Bosnia scholars had previously thought of MZs hopefully as “informal social networks rooted in tradition” (Pickering 2007), but also skeptically, seeing the potential of these community organizations to be easily diverted by local political networks into patronage channels (Pouligny 2005). In my research I focus on the role informality played in international organizations' communication with these local actors.

I argue that the language of informality was an essential tool in formulating and implementing the OSCE projects on the ground. In the theoretical narrative accompanying democratization and state-building initiatives, the term 'going local' reflected the conscious endeavour to embrace endogenous institutions, rather than imposing Western-centered concepts of what the relationship between state and society should look like. What theorists and practitioners of bottom-up state-

building largely failed to acknowledge, however, is the 'interpretive labor'⁶⁷ (Graeber 2012) carried out by those 'locals' who were expected to produce meaning of the international strategies and translate it to the local ground counterparts. Central to the understanding of these meanings is the emic concept of *ubleha*⁶⁸, a part of the landscape of informal interpretive filters used by Bosnians to understand and appropriate the democratization discourse. The last part of the chapter offers a closer look into the way informality as a communication vehicle served the local MZ representatives in their encounters with the *ubleha*-based international administration.

4.1. State-building, *ubleha* and 'going local'

Democratization scholars who helped to inform the discourse and technical guidelines on state-building in post-conflict countries assume that functioning formal institutions and electoral system were the necessary precondition to a thriving informal civic participation (Carothers 2003, Ottaway 2004, Pickering 2007, 2010). In the sequencing model⁶⁹ proposed by Carothers (2003), the development and fostering of formal institutions, the electoral system and state institutions, was expected to be followed by fostering informal ties in the so called civil society. This means that if a country successfully imitated the formal institutions and the state-society dynamic of the Western countries, it would achieve democracy (Carothers 2003: 90). While formal institutional structure in Bosnia was created by Dayton and elections soon followed, development of civil

⁶⁷ Graeber's (2012) term 'interpretive labor' relates to a notion of structural violence, imposed on the disadvantaged members of society, those less privileged, such as women, members of ethnic minorities, immigrants, who are expected to appropriate the language of the powerful ones, while making it resonate with their own lived reality.

⁶⁸ *Ubleha*, loosely translated to English as 'nothingness' or 'nonsense', is a term that Bosnian employees of the civil society sector – the recipients of international donor aid – use to encapsulate the local understanding of the language that the internationals were using. For "aid speak", see Secher Marcussen, H. and Bergendorff, S. (2004) 'Catchwords, Empty Phrases and Tautological Reasoning: Democracy and Civil Society in Danish Aid', in Gould, J. and Secher Marcussen, H. (eds.): *Ethnographies of Aid. Exploring Development Texts and Encounters*. Roskilde International Development Studies, Occasional Paper 24; pp. 95-96.

⁶⁹ Origins of this model can be traced back to 1980's scholarly writing on democratic transitions as witnessed first in Latin America and then in Eastern Europe (Carothers 2003, 2007).

society as a means of cementing the legitimacy of these institutions and healing the disrupted ties in society, quickly became one of the key objectives of foreign donor organizations.⁷⁰

As civil society was generally assumed to be non-existent prior to democratic transitions,⁷¹ the new focus on civil society aid meant an explosion of NGOs that did not exist prior to the supply of donor aid. In the words of one of Helms' (2013: 90) informants, "NGOs were springing up like mushrooms after rain." The NGO boom led scholars to re-examine some of the assumptions about what constitutes civil society and whether democratization through civil society assistance is in fact plausible. Pertaining firstly to the very assumption of considering elite-level professional NGOs to be a hallmark of democratic consolidation, colonial nature of western intervention in NGO development, immeasurability of added value, sustainability, dependency, and the societal linkage (Belloni 2000, Kaldor 2003, Kopecky and Mudde 2003, Hughes and Pupavac 2005, Fagan 2010). Authors criticizing this phenomenon described several pertinent issues that, according to them, defeated the purpose of this funding⁷². As Howard (2011) in her discussion of the pitfalls of civil society funding in the Bosnia context finds unsurprising, externally set priorities were considered to be a primary reason for which organized civil society became aid-dependent and adjusted to donors' interests⁷³.

From the perspective of long-term civil society practitioners, Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank (2013) summarize the problems with the civil society sector under an all-encompassing term

⁷⁰ Fagan (2010) notes that delivery of financial aid to civil society organizations became one of the means of international donor agencies to legitimize their continued presence.

⁷¹ In Bosnia, only less than 10% of the associations, unions and nongovernmental organizations currently supported through donor aid existed before 1992 (Kronauer 2009).

⁷² For discussion of relations between international donors and civil society as part of *ko fol* state-building, see chapter 5.

⁷³ Similar observation in different cultural and economic contexts has been made e.g. by contributors to Gould and Marcussen (2004).

ubleha. Their mock manual to key terms related to civil society was first published in 2004 on the pages of the Banja Luka-based magazine *Buka* and then re-printed throughout the following decade in E-novine and other web portals. The authors, both former NGO employees, provide a satirical portrayal of the key terms and concepts used by the local civil society sector in order to fit the jargon of the international donors. Their definition of *ubleha* is as follows:

Virtually non-translatable Bosnian word that has pejorative use to denominate something that is presented as real while it is nothing. A person who presents him/herself as full of virtues, skills and knowledge, but is actually a charlatan is called “ublehaš(ica)

Reflecting on the term 'civil society', the authors continue with their sharp-tongued critique of the term as a quintessential *ubleha*:

It is not just the opposite of military society, although that is what many think. However, it is neither politics, nor social narrative, nor the economy and it is not only urban; what is it – nobody knows, but it sounds good; also, one of the HLRW (Higher-level registry word).

The lexicon covered a wide array of entries that embody the jargon of donor-recipient relations, such as 'democracy,' 'democratization,' 'needs,' 'gender,' 'expert,' 'CSOlogist,' 'capacity building,' 'training', 'workshop,' and 'seminar.' Written with a large portion of self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek humor, the article at the time uncovered to both Bosnian and international readership the true understanding of the NGO industry. Supporting NGOs could no longer be seen as a panacea for the post-Dayton institutional impasse and societal lethargy.

Influenced by these and similar critiques of NGOization (Stubbs, 2007), the Section decided in early 2010's to introduce a different approach to improving the governance accountability-civic participation dynamic. Moving away from the overreliance on the pool of NGOs created after the

war and heavily dependent on international funding, its five-year plan, called 'Local First', turned towards locally embedded organizations, the *mjesne zajednice* (MZs, Local Community Organizations). MZs were neighborhood-based organizations that emerged in Titoist Yugoslavia as a part of direct self-management mechanisms (Leonardson and Mircev 1979). They were considered to be a type of a municipality level non-state organization that provides a communication and action platform between the state and citizens. Prior to the 1992-95 war, MZs served as the basic unit for the organization of self-management, including voters' meetings organized on a neighborhood basis to more structure and non-electoral matters. These meetings were supposed to provide citizens with the opportunity to secure information about, criticize, amend and ultimately approve both the lists of candidates for, and the activities and decisions of, all those decision-making bodies to which they elected representatives (1979: 191). They were encoded in both the 1963 and 1974 constitutions as a part of the referendum mechanism which would hold communes on the most important issues of common interest to citizens, on issues with an even split in the assembly. The non-electoral functions included submitting proposals and petitions to representative bodies and other organs. In practice, however, most of these mechanisms were not utilized, due to, as Leonardson and Mircev (1979: 193-194) summarize, lack of contact between the representatives and the voters, lack of power in most areas, bureaucratic and technocratic formulation of policies without citizen input.

The MZs were mostly abandoned as an unwanted legacy of the socialist regime and in the first post-Dayton decade were not thought of as a legitimate part of civil society – something that Pouligny (2005) would consider a part of the ambiguities of building 'new' societies in post-conflict countries. The reports on civic participation and accountability (ACIPS 2010, CCI 2011) building on research carried out by the World Bank (2002) brought them back on the agenda as an

under-used but potentially very important source of information on the needs in municipalities and as well a source of creating public policies on the local ground. In the portfolio of the Section, they overtime became one of the prominent targets of policy intervention, alongside the more established NGO partners that the OSCE worked with. While it is possible to see the move of 'going local' and extending support to these semiformal organizations as an attempt to honor Bosnia's pre-1992 institutional past, the rationales behind this shift were far more complex. As a part of the Section's engagement with informality in Bosnia, they were embodied in a series of strategies formulated at the headquarters by the international management. These strategies were, in turn, translated down to the local counterparts by a group of local intermediaries whose approach varied in the extent to which they considered the international concepts and strategies a part of *ubleha*. In the following, I show the fallacies that accompanied the process of 'translating down' informality in community management in the formulation and implementation phases of the Section's policy cycle.

4.2. Policy formulation: Managing informality locally

The Section emerged during the 2008 Mission restructuring as an entity whose aim was to address the more subtle, societal issues: establishing informal ties in communities that have been damaged or reconstituted by the war. In its founding document, the Section defined its object of intervention, the 'community', as:

- a) a territorial unit, in which people communicate with each other and have the sense of belonging to. It could be an MZ, group of villages or a small group of villages;
- b) an interest group of people/interest community: e.g. youth, displaced persons and refugees, elderly, people with special needs/disabled persons, minorities, cooperatives, etc. (OSCE, internal document, March 2008)

Since its inception, the Section went through several changes of scope and focus – from ad hoc mini projects that characterized its early stages, to the umbrella program called Local First Initiative. Its original purpose was to formulate projects together with civil society and local governments related to social inclusion and citizens' participation. As a part of the Mission, the Section's headquarters was in Sarajevo (Head Office) but project staff operated in the fourteen Field Offices spread throughout Bosnia. In terms of personnel, at the Head Office level the Section team was composed of one international official (Andrea), four national program officers and two Bosnian program assistants (see chapter 3).

In 2012-2013, the Section formulated its projects of the Local First initiative within five portfolios. First one was devoted to 'social capital' launched in 2011 in reaction to the number of reports by international donors and NGOs in the first decade of the 2000s. This project collaborated predominantly with NGO partners and later on, also with individual social entrepreneurs. The second portfolio was devoted to 'local volunteer services' and cooperated with a network of NGOs that engaged youth and the unemployed as volunteers. Third portfolio was a result of Senad's programmatic intervention: the 'watchdog initiative' which, under the heading of 'social accountability' was expected to form coalitions of non-governmental partners that would hold municipal government responsive to citizens. Fourth portfolio was 'women in local elections', which also encompassed all non-electoral issues related to gender. Final portfolio was dedicated to the MZs.

4.2.1. Informality in community management

What was the role of informal ties in community management? Some of the uncensored answers to these questions I gained in conversation with Radka, a thirty-five year old international official of Czech origin, posted to lead the Community Engagement team in the Tuzla office. Radka, a mother of two, entered the Mission in 2010 for pragmatic reasons. As she once told me, the more than decent international salary was enough to bring her husband (a musical composer) and their children to Tuzla while financing the construction of their family house in the Moravian countryside. Radka's previous postings in Saharan Africa, and the fact she had small children to take care of, provided her with what she called a 'healthy perspective on the international hassle.' Refusing to accept symbols of internationality, she wore inexpensive outdoor clothes and avoided the adoption of other symbols of the international privilege, such as going to beauty salons and the gym in Hotel Central. Radka looked with pragmatism and a dose of irony on the Mission and the eternal search for its *raison d'etre*:

The newest mantra in the office is that we are good in bringing people together. [But I think] perhaps they would anyways bring themselves together. We have quite a bit of a success with the expert groups, the bosses of departments of finances from the whole canton. They meet with the cantonal minister, which is great, because otherwise they have zero communication in these ministries. And here what we present is (...) a big success story. [One project, for example, included] ten Bosniacs and one Serb (...); two of these financial bosses went to the RS, that was a big inter-entity success, [that] they talk about budgets and these kind of logistics and they are fine talking about these things, not murdering each other but just talking.

What Radka referred to informally as "bringing people together" and "just talking," pointing out the dubious results of such endeavor, was in fact a complex of practices that the OSCE deployed in their work with the local counterparts.

Working on the community level meant deploying a set of strategies, and mostly non-financial tools, that were targeting the NGOs, MZs and governmental institutions. In case of the Community

Engagement Section, the focus was on the lowest level of administration: "the purpose of the section [was] to increase the level and quality of citizens' engagement with municipalities." (What is Community Engagement? Internal Document 2008) The other stated reasons for the emergence of the section was to include those groups and participants who were not able to make their voices heard, and whose participation in public affairs was thus limited. Here, the document specified "young people, rural communities, and those who live at the margins of society and are underrepresented in the democratic process."

Facilitating inter-entity and inter-ethnic communication, as per Radka's excerpt above, was one way of fostering the democratic process from outside. More often than not, however, the non-financial aspect of OSCE assistance, met confusion and dissonance among the local counterparts.

In Radka's words,

[w]e need to be careful about the counterparts, because sometimes we come to them and offer something and they get nothing out of this. [For example], we were offering [them] our project. [This means that] they will work on our terms. That is the problem of our rigid projects, it is like [telling them]: you will do this and that and no reward, because we have no money to help them, or even to host them at some amazing trainings, workshops, [going for a] three-day retreat at Jahorina, or even just giving them bags with our logo. Even these trivial things we cannot give them, so for them, it is a zero value, they are not interested.

The non-financial mechanisms of involvement, as specified in the founding documents of the Section, were the organization of trainings, workshops and seminars. This was a standard package of non-aid international organizations that could foster compliance with its goals and mission, not through monetary support but rather through educational stimulation. The way these formal mechanisms were received and reinterpreted on the local ground through the informal filter of *ubleha* is aptly embodied in lexicon references to "trainings," "workshops" and "seminars" in the Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank's (2013) *ubleha* guide to civil society. For the term 'seminar,' for example, he suggests the following definition:

["Seminar"] Ultimate Omega of everything; Epiphany); A virtual place where Ubleha resides – it comes in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, it reproduces and multiplies itself. An important part of the evaluation of a seminar.

["Evaluation of a seminar"] Essentially, it is similar to a report. A final divine seminar worship service for the purpose of reincarnating the seminar in the similar form, in the immediate future, in an even better hotel and in some new exotic city.

These lexicon entries capture the way in which many local civil society employees looked at the various types of educational and training programs that the international organizations were hosting. These actors considered the surface level formalism and professionalism as an *ubleha*, and they also remarked on the lack of hope in any possible benefits that these seminars and workshops could bring them. They expected that these were carried out primarily so that the internationals would feel good about themselves and could report them in an evaluation report. Similarly to what Radka, and a few other internationals experienced, many of the local counterparts translated these formal events into informal opportunities for having a *kafa* and socializing (*druženje*). The following sections reveal in further detail the ways in which informality contributed to the way meanings were negotiated between the international agency and the local counterparts.

4.2.2. Training future *ublehaši*

The organization of trainings, seminars and workshops belonged to core activities of the Section throughout the period of my research. Trainings were delivered typically by local, and in some cases international, employees to local audiences, composed of project partners such as NGOs and MZs. Alternatively, the Mission staff recruited trainers from among the civil society

counterparts.⁷⁴ In the Mission jargon, a synonymous term for training was ‘capacity building’.⁷⁵ The capacity to be built referred to “project management, liaising, building up of ‘human relations,’ and bridging differences.”⁷⁶ Trainings also took the form of workshops, which differed in a higher level of participation of the attendees. Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank (2013) aptly describe the difference between the two, as well as the local participants’ sense-making, with a dosage of Bosnian irony,⁷⁷ in the following way: “At a training, the participants are more passive and the trainer is much more authoritative than at a workshop. Different manifestations of *ubleha* are addressed and participants acquire certificates which they may show to their immediate and extended relatives and list in their SI-VI [CV] acquiring thereby the reputation of a tested *ublehaš*.”

While ‘empowerment’ was a frequent formulation of informality management used by Mission employees, understandings of the role of training-like activities among staff members indicated a great portion of confusion and disillusionment about their overall purpose. It was especially so when these were run within projects that resonated with the *ubleha*-based logic of foreign, externally imposed concepts. During my time there, ‘social capital’ was one such trap into which the Section members fell, in their attempt to manage Bosnian sociality in a way that would resonate with the donors’ prerogatives. Soon after I joined the Mission, Matea and Aida, two local employees, invited me to join a brainstorming session. They intended to come up with an idea for a ‘training of trainers’ on the subject of social capital. There was already a Manual for Social Capital in place, which listed a wide range of ideas on how NGOs could sustainably raise funds and

⁷⁴ In this case, the Mission would organize ‘training of trainers.’ In this way, the international agencies tried to contribute to what they saw as experience exchange among local civil society organizations.

⁷⁵ The term ‘capacity building’ generated resentment among mission members. Their attitudes towards this term resonated with what Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank (2013) in their lexicon of the civil society *ubleha* describe as “[s]ystematic studying of the language of Ubleha, with the final aim of becoming a consultant or at least a facilitator.”

⁷⁶ Community Engagement Section, ‘What is Community Engagement?’ Internal document of the OSCE, 2008.

⁷⁷ On the cultural status of irony in Bosnian sociality, see Jansen, Brković and Čelebičić (2016).

become independent of the international assistance.⁷⁸ Some of the ideas included in the manual, such as charity balls and birthday picnics seemed to Matea as slightly detached from Bosnian reality. However, despite the fact she found them “U.S.-inspired,” she believed that Bosnians, especially those more inclined towards social entrepreneurship, could benefit from it.

About a month later, Matea hired a local NGO consultant to deliver the training on social capital. By then, social capital became one of the favored frameworks for what the internationals viewed as a desirable outcome of informal social interaction. The consultant was a highly energetic social entrepreneur Kristina. During a short coffee break taken before the start of the training, Kristina told us her story, of how she had founded and fundraised for her eco farm through several institutions, including a local NGO, several embassies and foreign donor agencies. In her narrative, her way towards success was framed as relying equally on ‘social capital’ and ‘good connections.’ When we finally made it to the municipal hall where the training was to be held, we encountered about a dozen participants. The attendees included four employees of the Vlasenica municipality and a handful of other people who all seemed to know each other and had had their early morning coffee by the time we reached the assembly. Matea’s welcoming words set the tone of the event in Putnamian terms: she mentioned bonding and bridging social capital, trust, reciprocity and norms, and finally the motto of the Social Capital project, “cohesion through structures in community.” All of this was met with agreeing, yet blank faces of the participants. Kristina then followed with her part of the training: first, she invited all participants to an initial name game in which everyone was supposed to introduce themselves and present an idea they had for a socially entrepreneurial project. Then, Kristina pulled down a flip chart, where she sketched key terms,

⁷⁸ Some of these included charity balls, picnics and other concepts that were irrelevant to Bosnian culture and everyday reality.

such as 'gender' (employing local women on her eco farm), 'ecological production,' 'natural resources,' and 'self-sustaining entrepreneurship.' In a familiar tone, she explained to the participants that "these are the words that resonate very well with the foreign donors." (fieldnotes, 5-6-2012)

Throughout the presentation, the participants were nodding their heads in understanding, in a way that made it obvious this was not the first time they were exposed to a similar performance. During the coffee break, when I expected the participants to talk about their impressions from the workshops, however, there was either silence or careful chatter about unrelated things. When I approached Kristina and asked if she was satisfied with how the workshop went, she shrugged her shoulders, saying "this was probably too high level for them." Was 'high level' another term for *ubleha*? As I was finishing my coffee, I approached a man in his late fifties, with grey hair and hands that revealed hard physical work, asking what was his motivation for coming to the workshop. He said he learned about such events at the unemployment office (*na birou*) and that it is always nice to come and socialize (*popiti kafu*). Another man, who introduced himself as Marko, said he worked for an NGO (*u nevladinom sektoru*) and that he was interested in hearing what the internationals expected those days. 'Social capital' and 'social entrepreneurship' were the key aid speak terms which Kristina, as the local interpreter in the story, delivered to the local audience as means of repackaging and redesigning their activities in order to suit the new project demand from the international donors.

From the reactions of the audience and from the way she wrapped up her presentation, it was clear that she knew about and accepted the *ubleha* nature of these terms. In this sense, the audience welcomed her intention to equip them with a vocabulary that would possibly translate their demands on the donors into language understandable to them. A part of her performance, however,

was reminiscent of what Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank (2013) described as a key feature of *ubleha*: “in metaphysical sense, it is Heidegger explained to children in such a way that now even the adults cannot understand it at all and children are not interested in it anyway”. While Kristina, as an externally hired local person, worked with the *ubleha* filter rather implicitly, local staff, as we will see in an example below, went further in their interpretive efforts.

4.2.2.1. *Networking, mahalanje and the 2x2x2 technique*

As expressed by Radka at the beginning of section 4.2.1., "bringing people [with various ethnic backgrounds] together" was one of the unofficial goals of the Section's activities. Apart from trainings, workshops and seminars, the purpose of which was to educate, the goal of fostering social exchange was embodied in *network meetings*. In the case of the MZs, this entailed bi-weekly gatherings of the MZ representatives and municipal employees organized and hosted in municipal premises by field staff.⁷⁹ In the Watchdog coalition-building project, *networking* became a part of the official strategy introduced by Senad. His idea of the Watchdog project, introduced to the Mission in 2012, was that civil society organizations would "network, mobilize and keep [local] governments accountable." In his presentations of the project strategy in 2012, he fully embraced the jargon of the international development speak. Using visualized evidence in the forms of *pite* (Bosnian coll. for 'pies,' referring to the shape of informational diagrams), jargon abbreviations such as CLASP,⁸⁰ meant to convince the audience that there was *theory* behind this. In these workplace presentations, the rationale of the networking theory for watchdog coalition building was, in Senad's own words, to "not impose some (...) OSCE objectives on these people, rather to make

⁷⁹ The official agenda of these meetings was harmonization of the legal framework on the MZs, and issues of concern to the Section. These included: low participation of women and youth in local elections, "de-politicization" of the sub-municipal level and the introduction of secret ballot voting on all levels.

⁸⁰ CLASP (abbreviation) refers to credibility, legitimacy, accountability, service-provision and professionalism.

them aware that this is something that they *always* wanted to do." (interview with Senad, 2-12-2012)

The way the concept of 'networking' was delivered on the ground, however, dramatically differed from its framing in the offices of the UNITIC towers. On one such occasion, Senad, another local colleague, and I, met in Tomislavgrad, a small Herzegovinian town, to convince a group of local NGO representatives about the benefits of the watchdog coalitions. The meeting took place at the premises of one of the participant NGOs, in an unheated room with one long table covered by a plastic tablecloth, several ashtrays, plates with *napolitanki* (local water cookies), plastic cups, and about a dozen people sitting around, smoking and chatting. At first glance, the group seemed very diverse. There were five elderly ladies from a women's association with an unspecified objective. Then there were two men, representatives of a newly formed association with the ambiguous name 'Good People' (*Dobri Ljudi*). One participant was from a local rugby association. Finally, two women represented an association of mothers of children with disabilities. As became obvious soon after the beginning of the meeting, their expectations of the meeting differed from ours. As the 'Good People' representative made clear, in order to cooperate with us, or develop any of the watchdog initiatives that Senad was hoping for, they would need premises, financial resources, and one full-time paid employee.

Senad kept a professional face and proceeded to handle this misunderstanding. For about a half an hour, he explained the details of the 'watchdog methodology' and mentioned how using local methods such as *mahalanje*⁸¹ – the word-to-word gossiping spread through a neighbourhood –

⁸¹ The Bosnian term *mahalanje* comes from the turkism *mahalla*, which, similarly to *komšiluk*, encompasses several households composing a neighbourhood. The related verb *mahalati* has strongly negative connotations of spreading information through the grapevine, behind somebody's back, usually in order to damage or violate her reputation. It is also a strongly gendered concept, as this activity, in the linguistic sense, is connected with elderly women (*mahaluše*) who participate in this informal sharing instead of the positively sanctioned 'minding their own business.'

could help them. Then he went on to explain his infamous lobbying formula, which he called the '2x2x2 formula.' The 2x2x2 stood for *dva sata u kafani, dva litra rakije i dva kila mesa* ('two hours in a café, two litres of rakija and two kilos of meat'). Attendees did not seem to be convinced and repeated their problems to Senad: what they needed was resources, or access to resources, not advice.

Unlike Kristina, Senad purposefully unpacked the *ubleha* jargon and successfully translated the etic terms of networking, accountability and lobbying into the emic terms of mahalanje and his own formula based on the traditional items of Bosnian folkloric 'bribery': making friends and "bringing people together" through socializing in a local bar (*dva sata u kafani*), alcohol and meat as in kind payments (*dva litra rakije, dva kila mesa*). In acting towards the local participants, Senad wore two symbolic hats: the one of a 'local,' who understands Bosnian culture and is ready to translate *ubleha* into simple terms, and the one of an 'international' - a representative of an international agency, and thus a potential source of funding. As a 'local', Senad understood his counterparts' expectations about funding and the pro forma (*ko fol*) nature of the performance he was giving. He was aware that most of the participants did not come for the training itself but to see whether, after all, the 'international community' could not turn once again into a valuable financial resource. Since he admitted that there is no funding available, his influence over the group decreased, as evidenced by the overall loss of attention paid to him during the rest of the encounter.

In her 'aidnographic' account of social relations that emerged as an outcome of Western assistance to countries of Central and Eastern Europe after socialism, Wedel (2004) discusses the role of 'transactors' who in their multiple roles and identities helped to transform boundaries between "national and international; public and private; formal and informal; market and bureaucratic; state

and non-state; even legal and illegal" (p. 167). Radka, Kristina and Senad were such transactors in the Bosnian context. The story of Radka revealed the confusion and hesitation some international staff members held in their reflection about the way the organization was managing informality as a part of its engagement with Bosnian institutions. The formal concepts of accountability, social capital and enhancing gender equality, according to her, boiled down to 'socializing' and enabling common coffee-drinking of institutional counterparts. In her understanding, what the OSCE could actually achieve through this in terms of its formal objectives, was limited. Kristina and Senad acted as local intermediaries, in the first case external, in the latter internal, of these concepts towards Bosnians working at municipal governments and for local NGOs. In their work, they were both faced with the necessity to translate the experience-distant project formulation to local language. While Kristina, an externally hired consultant, resorted to using the "high level" international jargon, while encouraging the participants to embrace this language in their applications for donor funding, Senad used a more blatant technique with translating these concepts into *štela*-related local phenomena. On the level of policy formulation, there was a disconnect between concepts that the Mission embraced in order to manage informality on the local ground and the way these were translated on the local level to phenomena that the Mission, through its policies, was aiming to suppress. As the next section will show, similar disconnect existed in the particular example of the Section's engagement with the MZs.

4.3. Policy implementation: Translating informality in a Bosnian neighborhood

Informal systems of administration are rarely documented in a written form. In tracing their origin, one must rely on the second-hand historical and anthropological research related to norms and expectations imposed on interpersonal and community ties, norms of reciprocity embedded in cultural and religious traditions, as well as the nature of gift giving in a particular society (Mauss

1989). In this literature, Sorabji's (2008) article 'Bosnian Neighborhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment and *Komšilik* in Sarajevo' is a pioneer attempt to uncover the origins of systematized favor and gift exchange. In exploring the change and 'betrayal' in neighborly relations during the war, she places *komšilik*⁸² as a "positive political force and (...) a value alongside citizenship" (Sorabji 2008).

Without over-romanticizing the nature of neighborly relations, *komšilik* served as an important social glue in a traditional Bosnian society that cuts across ethnical demarcations. The debate on *komšilik* among scholars writing on Bosnia ranges between those who emphasize the benefits of the pre-1992 communal life and consider them a tradition betrayed (Bringa 1995, Neuffer 2002), and those who, like Bougarel (1996) see it as a practice antithetical to democracy. According to him, instead of citizenship, upon which a democratic order rests, the organizing structure of Bosnian political order has been a particular form of communitarian identity. "The informal institution of *komšilik* (good neighborliness) (...) was based on a constant reaffirmation of community identities and codes, and not on their effacement. (...) In terms of the relationships it established between the public and private spheres, between communitarian identity and social bonds, it represented the inverse of citizenship, rather than its premise" (Bougarel 1996: 87- 88).

It can be argued that the informal relations within *komšilik* created a fostering environment for non-kin, non-nationality system of favor exchange. Based on Hayden's (2002) premise, "the institution of *komšilik* (...) established clear obligations of reciprocity between people of different 'nations' living in close proximity" (p. 206). Departing from this notion, Henig (2013) offers a more nuanced understanding of the institution, in which it "consists of bonds, relations and

⁸² Bosnian word of Turkish origin which translates as neighborhood or neighborliness.

imagination that are cultivated in the flows of everyday sociality." (p. 10). Still, Sorabji (2008: 104) furthers this claim by conceptualizing *komšiluk* as primarily a moral space, as she refuses to see it as a rationally calculating behavior optimizing one's personal revenues in favor economy. The key organizing principle in her account is duty: "[D]uty with religious overtones, a duty that is sometimes pleasurable and profitable, sometimes painful and testing, but never a morally neutral choice." (2008: 104) She, however, juxtaposes this finding with *veze* that can be in certain contexts used as interchangeable with *štela* and that lacks the degree of moral commitment she finds typical of *komšiluk*. For example, "[i]f a person consistently fails to return or acknowledge a favour the *veze* relation ends." (2008: 105) Despite the difference in the nature of obligation connected to one's role as a member of *komšiluk* and to acting in a *štela* relationship, it cannot be unnoticed that one would not be able to go without another: the communitarian spirit and moral duty connected to *komšiluk* helped to foster relationships between individuals that were based on trust and that brought the notion of reciprocity from private sphere to the public. Social structure of *komšiluk* provides the key to understanding the strength of ties that were originally employed in a *štela*-act, in which the notion of kin often transgressed ethnic boundaries.

4.3.1. From *komšiluk* to *mjesna zajednica*

Formal expression of neighborhood-based self-governing structures, the *mjesna zajednica* (litt. 'local community', hereafter abbreviated as Mz) was codified in the 1963 Yugoslav constitution. The constitution specified and encoded forms of "direct" and "indirect" local self-management: directly, citizens were allowed to voters' meetings, elections and referenda. Through the MZ, the "indirect" management of the commune assembly was to be elected, and voter's meetings to be organized. However, from the beginning, this administrative level suffered from problems similar to the municipal and cantonal levels of administration. Already in 1963 to 1969, as Leonardson

and Mircev found out (1974: 194), the "numbers of women and youth serving (...) declined sharply, while the education level of assembly members rose significantly." In their research on participatory democracy in Yugoslavia, they discovered a shift towards a more elite character of the commune assembly, attributed to voter recognition that it was desirable to have influential representatives who could obtain favorable treatment for the commune or the MZ from "higher" (republican or federal) authorities. Already then, Leonardson and Mircev observe that a "growing tendency to rely on special favors to solve problems was read as an indication that self-management was not functioning." (p. 194)

A lot has been written about the ethnic reconstitution of Bosnian neighborhoods during the 1992-1995 conflict (Bougarel, 1996; Bringa, 1995; Maček, 2007), the perception of politics as a domain of 'filthy business' (Helms 2007), and about the resulting societal and political impasse (Kurtovic, 2012). However, little is known about how exactly these changes affected - and if at all - the subtle relations, bonds and imagination that informed the *komšiluk* and the MZ. As has been illustrated previously, the neighborhood-level organization of sociality became of interest to international actors in hope that the authenticity and local legitimacy of these institutions would foster greater democratization and participation among citizens of Bosnia. Were these expectations justified? What role did these semi-formal organizations played in the everyday life of the citizen? And, finally, how did the ideas and expectations of the OSCE towards the *komšiluk*-level of governance interact with the local understandings of informality?

4.3.2. Depoliticizing and rebranding the MZ

Earlier in this chapter, I showed how the OSCE communicated its overall strategies toward the local ground through an interpretive filter of informality to the community counterparts. Apart from these, the organization had two specific goals when it came to its engagement with the MZs:

depoliticizing and rebranding. The first concept in multiple ways illuminated the OSCE's problematic relationship with the 'political,' as well as the underlying agenda with which the local ground was to be (re)shaped. To start with, as a political organization, the OSCE had to be involved with governmental and other institutional actors with partisan affiliations. In Bosnia, the political landscape of 2012-2013 was still dominated by ethnically defined political parties, the same actors, or in some cases their direct offspring, that ignited the 1992-95 war. While entity- and federal-level politics were marked with a multi-party dialogue, the municipal, and in the case of FBiH cantonal, were the strongholds of ethnic parties. The OSCE was concerned that the local counterparts understood its presence as promoting further decentralization in the country. Such a move, despite the good intentions of bringing decision-making closer to the citizens and fostering bottom-up development, could easily be read as giving more power to municipal level war-time cronies and *foteljaši*.⁸³

Concerned with the delicate alchemy of 'going local' while at the same time avoiding empowering radicalized ethnic politicians,⁸⁴ the Section carved out a vision in which the revived MZs would be seen rather as nonpartisan platforms of civic action rather than a new level of governance in the already over-bureaucratized system. Connected to its vision of the MZs as 'accountability mechanisms' that act independently from the municipalities, it would also have been more desirable if independent candidates, and not party members or municipal employees, stood as candidates in the elections.

⁸³ The term *foteljaši* loosely translates 'armchair politicians' - for more on their role in ethnic politics, see Grandits (2007).

⁸⁴ As indicated earlier, 'civil society' was hardly an exception to the rule of ethnicized politics in the country: what with veteran and sports associations, organized ethnic lines, being one of the few endogenous signs of associative life.

While the Mission thus tacitly placed an equation mark between the 'political' and the 'partisan,' the problem of 'politicization' itself remained voiced only at the international level.⁸⁵ However, even at this level opinions diverged as to the extent to which political engineering of the MZ should take place: on one hand, the 'international' management tended towards supporting independent candidates and refurbishing the MZ as a formal civic platform, local officers especially those in the field, advocated for political members of the MZ councils. As Željko, a local field officer, once told me, according to him this was the only leverage that MZ council members could place on municipal councillors and the only way they could have their interests defended. He thought this was all the more relevant for rural MZs: while in the more advanced (urban) ones, where the municipality took care of service provision and other important aspects of the community existence, it was possible to take on the role of independent candidates and impose the language of accountability on them.

The idea of depoliticizing fitted the second, related strategy of managing the informality of MZs: 'rebranding.' This term was spelt out at the beginning of my work with the MZs by Andrea: at first, it seemed to be only a complementary agenda to the policy and legislative work that the Section intended to carry out, however, throughout my stay it came to dominate the MZ agenda. The image of the 'rebranded MZ' went hand in hand with the promoted trend of depoliticization and was enhanced with what Andrea expressed during one of our conversations as "making the MZ look cool and attractive for the young people." The logic behind such requirement was clear: the MZs seemed to offer a certain amount of unused potential as authentic, endogenous organizations.

⁸⁵ Instead, participants at the network meetings mentioned the following issues of concern: gap between municipal budgets allocated to urban versus rural MZs; allocation of resources (especially in small MZs), proper gender representation (while women were heavily underrepresented in most governmental structures, they thought this was not a legislative problem, rather one of awareness and understanding among citizens), and the costs of carrying out secret voting for MZ board members.

However, it was clear that the shape in which most of them were in 2012, were far from the ideal of an active, thriving civic platform, encompassing and representing all concerns, age groups and genders.

The practical tool that was used by the Mission to carry out both of these strategies was a *priručnik* (manual) for the representatives of the MZs, which the Section was working on since 2010. The idea to generate knowledge about how best to manage MZs came from senior management in the early stages of the Local First project and in many ways was to determine the work and functioning of this portfolio in the years to follow. At the time of my arrival to the Mission, the *priručnik* was a fifty-page document composed of bits and pieces written by local field office members, as a result of their experience with the MZs. It contained knowledge that was needed for the "ordinary, often illiterate," as Miroslav put it, people who were involved in these structures. The first part of the document was a long expose of the traditional relations with the municipal organs, the electoral system and the main bodies of municipal and sub-municipal administration. The first part of the *priručnik* focused on the ways that the OSCE policy agenda in managing the MZs could be articulated. This agenda included increasing the amount of young people and women that would stand as candidates in elections. Depoliticizing was also strongly emphasized in the project document, as was making the MZ "run more smoothly and make it more popular" in the eyes of the citizens.

When talking to my local co-workers at the Mission, it became obvious that nobody was particularly warm to the idea of working further with the MZs, neither had they much trust in the institution itself. "They are just a bunch of old men playing chess," Anne-Sophie said. This, according to her, was the coming understanding she and other young internationals gained of the

MZs. At network meetings⁸⁶ (see 3.2.2.), Miroslav would host a presentation on the status quo of the *priručnik* and would promise a prompt completion of this project. Usually, there were around fifteen to twenty leaders of the MZs present at these meetings, hosted by the OSCE to coffee, lunch, and then another coffee. It was a tacit understanding among participants, that all serious policy work would only start once the *priručnik* was published.

Insecurities and confusion regarding the purpose of the Mission's activities were reflected also in contestations over the purpose and target audience for the manual. At meetings, the field office staff, and local employees in particular, would wonder as to why such a *priručnik* was needed - the organization of the MZs was considered to be very unsystematic, with varying degrees of formality among municipalities and cantons. They were skeptical as to what added value and impact it was to make on the local ground. Over lunch breaks at the network meetings with the MZ representatives and Mission's local field officers, it became clear that doubts also emerged as to why an international consultant would be charged with collecting and editing⁸⁷ the manual. Was it to add an extra level of transparency, detached neutrality and 'professionalism' to the enterprise? Was it to make more politically neutral and thus accessible to a Bosnian audience disregard of ethnic background? Over time, the *priručnik* became a metaphor for the hopes the OSCE held in its official narrative towards the possibility to textualize, organize, structure and hence formalize the extensively out-of-grid MZs. Among local employees, however, it was a part of tacit knowledge, that this project, too, was an *ubleha*.

⁸⁶ During the time of my stay with the Mission, I participated in meetings in Mostar, Bihac, Vlasenica, and Tuzla.

⁸⁷ In contestation over the conceptual wrap-up of the project, Andrea resorted to one of the strategies employed frequently by the Section: composing a policy group. Members of this group included founders of a research institute Analitika, NGO 'Centers for Civic Initiative' and, as was planned, representatives of both entity electoral commissions. Finally, it was only a member of the Republic of Srpska who joined the group. This group met three times between May and July 2012 and throughout its meetings, several conceptual ideas and strategies came up and later fell out of favor with the members.

An expectation that was earlier iterated by Roger – that of MZ being a mechanism of 'social accountability' – persisted: since municipal governments were believed to be the stronghold of ethno-national politics by the ethno-national leaders, the Mission's strategy of de-politicization resonated strongly with the idea of creating a leverage against this level of administration. The idea of the rebranded, 'cool' MZ became synonymous with the endeavour of the section to revivify an old semi-formal Yugoslav structure, with a Western, liberal twist to it. In the following, I confront this idea with the historical background of neighbourhood organizing in Bosnia and a set of encounters between the OSCE and MZ representatives, in order to show the conflicting expectations of informal organizing on the local ground.

4.3.3. Informality in neighborhood governance

As conduits of the power of informality, the MZs were an expression of the hopes for 'normalcy' and statehood that Jansen (2012, 2015) describes as a trait of post-war, post-Yugoslav lives. In his ethnographic account of relating to the state in a Sarajevo neighborhood, Jansen (2012) offers the concept of gridding and grid-matrix as an analytical tool that helps understand the phenomenon of *desire* for gridding. He suggests that many anthropologists conceive of state grids as imposed externalities, following Scott's (1998) proposition that this singular grid – state and its institutions – has a propensity to fail for its lack of recognition of *metis*, the experiential wisdom of society. For Scott, the operational logic of the formal institutions is to replace the bottom-up, endogenous, authentic, local system. While anthropologists of informality tend to show how people evade, circumvent and twist bureaucratic procedures, there is still a room for understanding the complex realities of simultaneously hoping *against* and *for* the state.

During my work on the *priručnik* I came into contact with people working with the MZs on the NGO side, and also with MZ representatives, councilors, presidents and related volunteers. While

there were many similarities in the way the MZs were run, there were also large discrepancies in terms of their formal status, relationship with municipality, electoral provisions and lack thereof. From the perspective of the OSCE, holding elections with a secret ballot was an indicator of a truly democratic potential of these organizations. This meant that MZs that were hand-picked to be interviewed for the *priručnik* as examples of healthy MZ functioning were usually those that had elected the five- to seven-member council every two to four years. Due to the very intimate ties in most neighborhoods, however, this was no guarantee of neutral civic participation. The turnout in MZ elections tended to be extremely low. Many MZs instituted a minimal threshold of 10% of registered voters in order to validate the electoral results. In cases where insufficient number of voters turned up for the election, municipal governments had the option of either declaring them null and the MZ thus would not be formed. Alternatively, some municipalities could in this scenario nominate a *povjerenik*, a bureaucrat with an office at the seat of the assembly who was responsible for one or several MZs.

The vocations of the MZ representatives that I encountered across Bosnia differed. Many of the councilors and presidents were pensioners, as taking care and interest in neighborhood affairs was largely considered to be an old-age pursuit. For others, as Jansen (2015), too, observes, MZs were a stepping stone for higher level politics, aspirations for getting a secure place at the municipality, or a useful party affiliation. In cases when MZ representatives matched the (ethnic) party forming municipal government, they were a useful source of *štela* for those neighbors who were pursuing (*ganjali*, litt. chasing) administrative errands at that level. There was also a handful of MZ representatives who were working on volunteer basis and who had full time public jobs, such as

teachers, bakers, or, in rural areas, farmers. In few cases, an MZ representative was also an "NGO entrepreneur"⁸⁸ running a donor-catered NGO.

For most of the MZ representatives I had talked with, the primary task of the MZ was to ascertain infrastructural repairs in collaboration with the municipality. This clearly contrasted with the hopes of the OSCE, which saw the MZ as a platform for civic activism and a grassroots leverage against municipal power. In the words of Mediha, a basic school teacher and an MZ President from Turbe, Travnik:

MZ is a *veza* [connection] between municipality and citizens (...) it is a voluntary activity, we (...) work without any financial rewards... not even [enough] for fuel or telephone.

Municipal budgets counted with approximately 150 KM per month for the expenses of a given MZ. The councilors usually found this amount insufficient for proper functioning of the MZs and meeting the people's demands.

In our conversations and recorded interviews, the complexity of the nested informal power came out also in the way in which the MZ representatives referred to their electorate. In some cases, there was the endearing, informal term *komšije* (neighbors). However, in the MZs that had separate premises⁸⁹ and held elections, the term *građani* (citizens) implied the hope for a more formal, grid relationship between the MZ structure and the people⁹⁰. In these situations, however, the MZ councilors portrayed themselves as an extended hand of the municipal government:

⁸⁸ This term builds on Šavija-Valha and Milanović-Blank (2013) satirical term 'NGO mafia' which implied that people working in the civil society sector were a very close community and used personal contacts and favors towards a personal economic profit.

⁸⁹ Very often, premises for MZ meetings were merged with other functions carried out in the neighborhood - typically, this was a municipal office, or the *dom kulture* (litt. house of culture), referred to as the *dom*, a multifunctional building for cultural productions and youth club meetings.

⁹⁰ For an ethnographic account of gridding in Sarajevo suburbs, see Jansen (2013).

[O]ur citizens (*građani*) cooperate very well with the MZ, they are used to coming to this level before addressing the municipality (...). The requests of the citizens are big. Perhaps they don't understand that municipality does not have so much money as they would need. They need to be patient, maybe there will be more money next year.

The out-of-grid character of the MZ formations sheds light on the elusive relationship between yearning for the reliability of the formal, and the pragmatism of the informal power.

4.3.3.1. A tale from Ivanica: "They taught us how to catch fish"

The area surrounding Ravno in Herzegovina, is extremely arid, it is a stony, unwelcoming, mountainous stretch of land. In the distance, we can see the shores of Dubrovnik, the destination of many war refugees during the 1992-1995 war. As field officer Željko mentions on our way here, so are the faces and characters of local people. Before we meet our interviewees, Željko explains to me that prior to the formation of the MZ, there was no electricity, running water, roads – everything was destroyed by the war. Ivanica, an isolated settlement within the municipality of Ravno, is inhabited by a returnee community of Serbs from the RS. The reason for which the MZ has been active here is because it has to resist political opposition from the municipality and cantonal government, both of which are Croat-dominated. Along with reconstructing infrastructure, the local MZ has focused on finding alternative means of income generation for the local population – among these, the MZ has supported the creation of a cheese producing factory and an association of bee-keepers.

In an unheated room, eight men with sun-dried skin and sharp features are seated around an improvised white conference table. Pero, the forty-five year old president who has been in function since 2009, when the MZ was formed, gave me the account of the bad situation in which Ivanica was at the beginning of his mandate: "Ivanica did not have electricity, people were living in very, very bad conditions, in garages, holes, so we started with requests [to municipality], so they finally

started to do something about it, the canalization, sewage, to find some common resources (*zajednička sredstva*), everything was coordinated by the MZ, done literally by all the citizens present here. And then in 2008 we addressed all the state level ministries, talked about priorities (...)" Most of the works in the community were voluntary and there still remained a lot to be done in terms of facilities, road construction and rebuilding of war-damaged houses.

One of the present men, sitting on Pero's right hand, continued about the role that cheese production since 2010 had played in reviving the local economy. In an attempt to generate resources from less destroyed surrounding areas, local representatives first turned to the nearby Dubrovnik, where people donated to Ivanica equipment for beekeeping. Regarding the international community and its role in reviving community life in Ivanica, Pero's friend, who introduced himself as Božo, mentioned several times the phrase "they taught us how to catch fish." He explained that the 'internationals' showed them how to frame projects in a way that would later help them gain additional resources from the municipality, namely some 100 000 KM (*stotinu hiljada ka-emova*). The municipal government, following the cantonal guidelines, had allocated funds for civil society organizations and social entrepreneurs. Since Pero had been on good terms with Željko, he had attended some of the OSCE trainings on project writing and social capital. There, Pero learned the key terms of the aid speak, and could help (*naštelió je*, litt. 'provided through *štela*') his friend Božo in the interpretive labor of reframing his cheese production as a 'social enterprise.'

As Pero does not omit to wrap up, the agility and efficiency of the Ivanica MZ council in channeling municipal and international donors' funds into the neighborhood have been proxies for its success.

We just would not give up, we are now searching for additional donors, who can give us some more money (...) at the same time encouraging neighbors to join (...) who would do something like Božo with the cheese." (4-9-2012)

The informal relationships among the MZ councilors, between the MZ President Pero and OSCE officer Željko, and between Pero and 'social entrepreneur' Božo reveal the informal power of MZs at its best. The demands placed on state were, however, still wrapped in the idea of humanitarianism. Throughout Pero's and Božo's narrative, it became clear that apart from infrastructural build-up, *humanitarne akcije* (humanitarian aid) were one of the major motivations for the post-war resuscitation of the MZ. Informal mobilization of resources was carried out on the micro level, through *paketi* – humanitarian packages collected among neighbors – but also through demands placed on the international agencies through the language of foreign-led state-building, understood by these local actors as *ubleha*.

4.3.3.2. A tale from Ljubuški: MZ as vehicles of post-bellum humanitarianism

Ljubuški is another sun-dried, rocky small town in Herzegovina. Having arrived on a long and desolated road from Trebinje, the Mostar field officer Lejla navigated us towards the site where we were to meet the local exemplary MZ representatives. Ljubuški is divided into several parts, the richer, clean and ethnically homogenous, Croat parts one and two lie in the central area. Ljubuški 3, formerly known as *Gornji grad* (Upper town) sits on a small hill above the center and is, by the OSCE office, considered to be a problematic, as it is ethnically mixed. There are some seventy, eighty households. While this part of Herzegovina suffered from severe violence during the past war between the majority Croat population and the Muslims, post bellum Muslim returns have been sporadic. The very popular president of the MZ, Hasan Music, however, is a Muslim. The nine-member MZ council is further composed of five Croats and four Muslims.

In a poorly lit house that also hosted a small *kafana* with a modest socialist-style furniture and few modern appliances, Hasan is sitting with two other men and a woman, all of whom of retired age, possibly in their late sixties. As had become a typical introduction among the *priručnik* interviewees, Hasan starts his account of the history and background of his MZ with a financial prelude, stressing how under-financed MZ activities are and his involvement pro bono, as a volunteer:

Before the war I worked for Famas [socialist company that no longer exists], now I'm retired and now (...) when we get the electricity bill, I have to pay with my own money.

The MZ was formed in 2007 and registered prior to the MZs in the richer neighborhoods, in 2012. According to Hasan, the MZ was ostracized by the municipal leadership because of its large Muslim population and had not been allocated sufficient finances from the public budget. Finances were needed for the reconstruction of sewage system. Another struggle with municipal representatives emerged over the premises of the MZ: finally, people from the neighborhood had renovated a former cattle stall into the *kafana* where we were sitting. Since the establishment of the premises, Hasan was happy to share, relations with the municipality had improved. Wanting to be taken seriously, Hasan and his council members developed a plan, in which "we included infrastructural priorities, such as: roads, lighting and sewage." In terms of infrastructure, they had to start from scratch, as all the roads were damaged by war and rain.

The biggest issue that Hasan had been facing was garbage collection and sewage. Because of its location above the other town parts, problems with sewage in the community would impact the other communities as well, which was the point where the municipality, reluctantly, agreed to address these issues also financially. But as Hasan revealed, these were very untransparent processes – he and his MZ were not included in the decisions:

We don't know who the leader of the works was, every year a million marks is budgeted for these things, now we got the integrated inspection visiting because I am not familiar with these things, I only know that 15 million marks came, and now - who is responsible, who ordered these things, I don't know.

Humanitarian help, referred to as *paketi*, was apart from infrastructural refurbishment the second other significant endeavor that the MZ representatives were engaged with.⁹¹ Mentioning his good relationships with Mladenko, the representative for MZ at the municipality, it seems that distribution of *paketi* was completely informal in the MZ: "if somebody just needs a *paket*, they can come and simply get it."

The words of Hasan are attested by a second elderly man sitting by the table, who praised the MZ leader for his plans to clean the water sources in the community as well as to 'attack' municipal leadership with more and more letters and requests. Turning towards the other participants at the meeting, an elderly woman of Croat background, Ana Lujević, explains to me with a tired, blasé smile, the everyday pragmatics of running a semi-formal governance structure on the local level: "So we just sit around, some guys come to watch TV a bit, and so on.." (*ovako sjedimo malo, dodje neki muski, pogleda televiziju, tako to...*). Having bought a property in the community in 2000, Ana says she is very happy with how the MZ has been re-organizing infrastructure in the community. She also believes it is the persona of the highly insistent Hasan who would not give up on filing disclaimers toward the town administration.

The dissonance between Hasan, the president of an ethnically mixed MZ, and the municipality limited his role as a *štela*. Unlike in Ivanica, where the President's informal connection with OSCE officer Zeljko, helped significantly in the MZ's capacity to attract additional funds for 'social entrepreneurship,' demands to the higher administrative level in Ljubuški were framed in terms of

⁹¹ For more on a locally organized humanitarian help in a Bosnian border town, see Brkovic 2014.

post-war humanitarianism. Here, against the hopes of the OSCE that MZs could be nonpartisan, non-ethnically based structures, the Ljubuški 3 MZ was discriminated in terms of access to funds and the transparency of this process, as it was thought of as Bosniac. In this context, the economic security system within the MZ relied on informal self-help in the form of *paketi* as remnants of the wartime humanitarianism.

4.3.3.3. *A tale from Kalesija: Folklorism and Dom organizing*

Kalesija is about a twenty-minute car ride from Tuzla, it is a sleepy town in Northern Bosnia with not many public events. Located in the area of responsibility of the Tuzla office, I was taken there by Radka, Nadina and Milanka, the community engagement team. In the car, Radka and her colleagues were skeptical about the role of MZs in their region and say that in few municipalities there would be a relevant line-up of people for interview. The major cultural institution in Kalesija is the *dom*, which before the war was the center of community life in Kalesija. As Nadina explains to me, the *dom* technically belongs to the municipality, as the local MZ was not allowed to own property. In front of the *dom*, we met Edis, an NGO entrepreneur (see above) in his early thirties. Edis is a co-founder of the NGO Dom that was established in 2008 by a group of local volunteers.

Sitting in a *kafana* across the street from the *dom*, Edis gives an account of how the NGO was formed: the reasons for setting up the NGO were, in Edis' words, "*da se omladina sbliži, da se što više druži*" (for the youth to get closer, to socialize as much as possible) and the aspect of socializing and its importance came up several times throughout the interview. Apart from socializing (*druženje*), people in MZ were interested in ecology, infrastructure, some humanitarian actions. After coming into contact with the OSCE officers, Edis became interested in youth politics and registered his NGO. As he explains,

We were looking for support from the MZ in terms of premises. they were very welcoming, allowed us into the premises across the road [from the *kafana* where we speak], in a former hospital, where workshops and seminars and presentations were held. That was the first part of the help – whatever additional [help] we were looking for, we got from them. Only in terms of financial assistance, we can only apply for funding together as the MZ does not dispose of a budget independent from the municipal budget.

Speaking of what the *dom* currently offered to citizens, Edis numbered on the fingers of his right hand, "culture, youth activities, kung-fu, karate, some manifestations, some seminars, and game watching." Apart from being used by Dom, it is also available to an association Korak and the traditional Yugoslav institution of KUD, *kulturno umjetničko društvo* (culture and arts association). All of these associations were interested in using the premises for *druženje*.

The concept of *druženje* was prominent in Edis' narrative, as it stretched across diverse activities:

This year we had a couple of games (*prenose utakmica*), one workshop – in our territory there is a couple of literary writers – who entertained the children. So these writers were playing with the children. Some elementary school kids came but also some high school ones. Another time, kids came from nearby towns of Zvornik and organized some traditional crafts (*šćernice, britice*) and souvenir making that they later were selling. Those were sold pro bono [as a charity fundraiser] for one of the citizens who suffered from cancer. There were stands, kids were taking care of this, playing some rhythmic music (...)

For Edis, informal socializing, *druženje*, had an inherent value in and of itself. For him, it was the primary reason for MZ organizing. His ideas found resonance with the current leadership at the municipality, who were receptive to his proposal for cooperation and funding applications. As he explains, "the nine of them that are in the council now came forward and are very helpful, they apply with us for projects and funding: president [of the MZ] together with the others."

As follows from my research on the MZs, encapsulated in the three vignettes above, Bosnians working in or with these semi-formal organizations conceived of these organizations as a platform

for informal socializing, informal distribution of humanitarian aid, and post-war infrastructure reconstruction. While the OSCE envisioned the new role for MZ in Bosnian society as one of a 'cool, de-politicized, rebranded MZ', a platform of civic activism and social accountability, the implementation of this project on the local ground got stalled due to lack of interest and translation possibilities on the part of the local intermediaries.

4.4. Conclusion

As opposed to earlier models of policy mobility, such as 'policy transfer', 'policy diffusion' and 'policy learning', interpretive policy scholars have offered the concept of 'policy translation' (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai, & Stubbs, 2015; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2009; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2004). In this view, policy is not a static object, but a vivid entity that is continuously composed and recomposed of practices of translation. It moves horizontally but also vertically, from policymaking decision centers to the 'implementation' frontier. In this chapter, I followed the policy translation of informality management between the international agency (OSCE) and its local counterparts, namely the sub-municipal, semi-formal actors *mjesne zajednice* (MZs).

I introduced the concept of 'translating down' as a process in which meanings of the projects formulated and implemented by the OSCE were first negotiated within the agency and later with Bosnians employed in NGOs or engaged with the MZs. Local transactors were an important communication node in this process as their role was to translate the experience-distant concepts into terms familiar to local audience. For the transactors, many of these terms were understood as *ubleha*, an empty signifier. In this process, the prerogatives of international assistance became translated into the local language of informality: advocacy and watchdog coalitions as *mahalanje*, social capital as *štela*, and social entrepreneurship funding as a form of *paket*. The democratization literature rationalizes the move of 'going local' in assistance as one of a greater sustainability of

the outcome and ownership in the process. However, the evidence that I collected while observing interaction between the 'internationals', transactors and local counterparts shows that through translating down, 'going local' became a hollowed out phrase filled, on the recipients' part, with meanings that went contrary to the internationals' intentions. As we will see in the following chapter, the mismatch between how informality was lived and framed by the Bosnians and what it was expected to be by the internationals, led to an adaptive practice of translating up through performativity of the *ko fol* state-building.

5. 'Translating up': Performing state-building in the anti-corruption movement

In this chapter, I analyze the reverse process of *translating up* in which actors employed in Bosnian civil society, in a group of NGOs associated in the anti-corruption network ACCOUNT, embraced and enacted the language of the international donors. Based on a narrative analysis of ethnographic vignettes and encounters over-time with key personalities within ACCOUNT, this chapter shows that *translating up* of emic concepts of informality depended largely on the actors' perception of self and their audience: the international donor community, the Bosnian citizenry, the researcher in a more formal interview setting, or colleagues in an informal one. In this chapter I engage the dramaturgical approach, as employed by Goffman (1974, 1990) to analyze the role-playing that took place in *translating up* for an array of audiences. I show the effects of performativity in *translating up* through the interpretive filter of informality. Seen as *ko fol* (as if), all institutional engagement including the formal side of international state-building projects and prerogatives was perceived as a cover-up façade for how things were actually expected to work: through networks of informality. This led to an erosive effect on the formal endeavor associated with external state-building – understood as *ko fol* state-building.

To support this argument, the chapter proceeds as follows. The first part introduces the concepts used by Goffman and Wedeen in their analyses of human performativity and the politics thereof. The second part examines the ways in which corruption and informality was shaped on the 'front stage', analyzing the individuals and institutional actors, their roles, masks and audiences. The final part offers a look into the 'back stage', where both the local and the international actors uncover the performative (*ko fol*) nature of the anti-corruption fight.

5.1. Performativity, theatricality and informality

On a warm afternoon in late May 2013, I decided to attend an event that one of my informants in the ACCOUNT network invited me to during our interview. This one was funded by one of the European development agencies, and was taking place at the premises of the BiH Parliament assembly. The topic was reform of the Bosnian justice system and the ‘efficient fight against corruption’. The program was attractive because of a series of high profile guests including the Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, Presiding Judge of the Supreme Court, the Head prosecutor, President of the International organization of prosecutors, president of the Anti-corruption Agency and other prominent speakers. Arriving from a meeting in Mostar and heading to the parliamentary building on Marindvor around 10am, roughly an hour after the official beginning of the event, I passed through the security guards without much notice and headed up to the second floor. As I did not want to enter the amphitheater to interrupt the speakers, I was waiting around the cigarette-smoke filled lobby, hoping that a break would happen soon enough for me to join the next session. Before that happened, two casually dressed Bosnian men approached me and asked me to join them in the technicians’ room to have a better view of the event. Soon after that, I was seated on a broken revolving chair next to the sound mixing board, and handed a headset. From where I sat, I indeed had a perfect overview of the amphitheater: all the seats were filled, Dejan was chairing the event, and giving the floor to the Deputy president of the Parliamentary assembly and Chair of the commission for supervision of the work of the Anti-corruption agency.

After the two technicians left, I was trying to engage in a conversation with their colleague who remained in the studio and ask him his opinion about the event. He was first reluctant to speak, seemingly bored with the scene and passing me the common line of disgust towards politics accompanied by a resigned hand gesture, as if chasing away a bothering fly, “oh this is just empty

talk” (*ma ovo je samo šuplja priča*), avoiding any chit chat and turning to his business. Finally, he reached out behind him into a wardrobe with some water bottles and other supplies and pulled out a small bottle of cranberry juice. “Need a glass?”, “No. Thank you.” After a pause he asked me what I was doing here. When I explained I was doing research about *štela* and corruption, his reaction was: “hah, so you could not come to a better place.” “Yes, that’s what everyone says” I responded. “Know this guy?” He pointed a finger to the second row in the amphitheater on the speakers’ left hand side, to an area where I recognized a couple of faces from the Bosnian political scene, mixed with the Account civil society leaders. “He is the cousin of a guy who named his wife to be the chief of Koševo hospital. There,” he points finger towards the Prime Minister, “is a man who appointed his brother to be the director of Autoceste, and still remains in function.” And then he added, “imagine that people always follow their leaders. If you now know that the person who has landed a job in the government lived in some normal apartment before, drove some normal car, and after four years has enormously multiplied his riches, what kind of a message is it to the small man. Everything is possible, blend into the system, take as well, if you are offered a chance because you don't know when you will be able to again. You know, to set something up, to use the system, this is what you have to do for your family, or they will laugh at you. Now, all of them sitting here,” he waved with his hand towards the whole left-sided section, “would do the same if they had the chance.”

The idea that human interaction in an institutional setting resembles a theatrical performance, and that actors take on a variety of roles and masks, found its resonance in early social constructivist literature. For example, Berger and Luckmann (1967), in their analysis of the social construction of reality, observe the following:

Only through (...) representation in performed roles can the institution manifest itself in actual experience. The institution, with its assemblage of ‘programmed’ actions, is like the unwritten libretto of a drama. The realization of the drama depends upon the reiterated performance of its prescribed role by living actors. The actors embody the roles and actualize the drama by representing it on a given stage. Neither the drama nor the institution exist empirically apart from this recurrent realization.

In order to investigate the role of performativity in the shaping of informality, this chapter employs and expands the analytical toolbox offered by Erving Goffman. In his dramaturgical approach and frame analysis, Goffman (1974, 1990) complements other analytical perspectives on human action and social relations with an angle that focuses on impression management, roles and identities that emerge as an outcome of staged performances.

His concept of performance is defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (1990: 26). Taking the individual as a base, those who are around her in a given act are thus assigned the roles of audience, observers or co-participants. Performances are produced on the ‘front stage’, a space that helps define the situation for the audience. On the front stage, performers typically accentuate some parts of their appearance and suppress others. On the other hand, the ‘back stage’ or ‘back region’ is for Goffman the space where these suppressed aspects make an appearance (1990: 114).

The tension between the ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ is one of the sources of analytical material in this chapter. The front stage is presented by communicative acts and appearances at conferences and official meetings. The back stage is formed by interactions during car drives, in between breaks, in lobbies and halls. However, in observing actors in civil society in Bosnia, this binary gets more complicated. Between ‘front’ and ‘back’, there was a scale of behavioral expressions in between that to a large extent depended on the audience for which those acts were staged. It is also important to know that all of these performers were recorded by me, and thus never fully off-stage.

Rather, it is possible to say that roles in this process shifted together with the perception of my role as a part of the international donor audience, researcher, and an 'in-between-international' (Chapter 3).

In his analysis of the role of audience, Goffman (1974) provides some examples of different types of audiences. He suggests distinguishing performances based on their 'purity.' This means referring to the level of exclusiveness that the watchers had on a given activity they were watching. At one end of the scale, there would be "pure" performances, such as dramatic plays, nightclub acts, ballet, and much orchestral music – when the act of play is directly intended for an audience. Contests and matches are further down the spectrum, "for acting as if the final score of the game is what drives them rather than the gate receipts" (Goffman 1974). Further down would be "personal ceremonies" such as funerals and weddings. As the most impure of all, Goffman ranks work performances: those situations in which persons do not openly or willingly 'perform' and show no concern for the dramatic elements in their labor (Goffman 1990: 50). The series of performances portrayed in this chapter belongs to this last category, even though, as I show in section 5.3., the actors were aware of the dramaturgical contours of their labor.

Central to the study of labeling informality is Goffman's (1990: 24) assumption that, as performers, individual acts and narratives cannot be judged in categories of morality but in terms of the impression they aim to convey. Projecting images of morality then becomes a part of the performance that individual actors portray. The trope that my informants embraced was the figure of the *normalan, pošten čovjek* (litt. "normal, honest person"). However, the issue of normalcy was not something that reflected the state of affairs in Bosnian life but rather a craving for the return

of old times⁹². What *normalan, pošten čovjek* does then became a hypothetical point of reference for morality that was lost and that had to be replaced by the pragmatics of performances staged for the domestic as well as international institutions.

In political science, the concept of performativity was introduced by Lisa Wedeen (1999, 2008), a political ethnographer and an interpretivist writing on symbolic politics in the Middle East. In her account of the “politics of as if” in Syria (1999), she describes the enforced obedience, and induced complicity which helped maintain Asad’s regime in power, pervading – “as if” - the most intimate zone of the regime subjects’ privacy: their dreams.⁹³ In her second book, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (2008), Wedeen elaborates on the concept of performative practices. As opposed to a single act of ‘performance’, performatives refer to a structural logic of iterative practices that shape the actants’ identities and public domains of contestation, reminiscent of Habermasian public sphere (2008: 16). In order to expose how democracy works in ‘peripheral ways’ in the Yemeni setting, she draws on Derrida’s (1988) ‘iterable nature’ of performative practices, through which performers constitute themselves as social beings or subjects. Based on her analysis of qat-chewing as an informal democratic practice, she concludes that democracy does not necessarily manifest itself in the fulfillment of particular democratic acts, but is delivered by democratic persons who are themselves “constituted through the doing of democratic deeds” (Wedeen 2008: 17).

In comparison with the Middle Eastern politics of performativity, my research in Bosnia offered several similarities and points of departure. Similar to what Wedeen (2008) describes as politics

⁹² Jansen (2013, 2015) elaborates how the issue of yearning for normalcy fell into portrayals of Bosnian statehood.

⁹³ In a vignette that forms the backbone of Wedeen’s (1999) chapter, the soldiers lined up in front of their commander and willfully describe their previous night’s dream, in which they glorify Asad and other symbols of state power (1999: 67-87).

of as if, relations between institutional actors and citizens were governed by the pervading filter of *ko fol*. The colloquial expression *ko fol* was used by my Bosnian friends and informants to mock a situation which by the speaker was considered to be pretense. The derived verb, *folirati se*, in turn signified that someone was pretending something just for the appearances, to keep a façade. In the state-building context, the performativity of *ko fol*, however, was not understood by the governed ones as a sign of obedience to an enforced regime. Rather, it was expressed with subversive resistance. The *ko fol* filter erased any ontological duality between us and them when it came to understanding the ‘true’ nature of navigating institutional requirements. This ‘true’ understanding was that both a Bosnian and another Bosnian in the role of a public official, NGO representative or a street-level bureaucrat, know that the more complex formal requirements appear to be, the more likely they are fake – and the more one actually needs to resort to informal channels. Vis-à-vis the internationals, this understanding was more complicated. While local Bosnian civil society activists shared an understanding that there is no difference between the usage of informality between the two worlds, they also understood that the ‘internationals’ think otherwise. Referring to this dynamic, Senad once uttered the words "*kralj je gol*" (litt. 'the king is naked'), alluding to Andersen's tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes.' This created a situation in which the needs of the ‘local ground’ had to be *translated up* to the international donors in order for the civil society to blossom.

5.2. ‘Translating up’: Staging informality for the internationals

The anti-corruption fight in Bosnia was led by a set of state and non-governmental agents. The leading governmental agency was the Agency for prevention of corruption and coordination of the fight against corruption (*Agencija za prevenciju korupcije i koordinaciju borbe protiv korupcije*). Based on the Law on the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight

against Corruption (Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, nr. 103/09), the Agency was created in 2009 with three goals. First goal was preventing the detrimental effects of corruption on the development of democracy. Secondly, its aim was to respect of the basic human rights and freedoms, and finally provide for the economic and industrial development and other societal values. The work of the Agency was institutionally backed up by a plethora of other governmental agencies.⁹⁴

Despite the post-Dayton NGO boom, at the beginning of my fieldwork, in May 2012, there was only a handful of non-governmental organizations that were specifically targeting the problem of corruption. Apart from the local branch of Transparency International, there were four local NGOs that primarily focused on corruption. The Association Kyodo, which aimed to provide the legal analysis of public budget expenditures, and intended to mitigate corruption in the higher education system. The Association for Protection of Guarantors, provided legal advice in cases of fraud in the micro-credit and loan system. The civic association Tender covered the segment of transparency in public procurement. Finally, the youngest of these organizations, the Whistleblowers (“Udruženje uzbunjivača u BiH”), was an association of people who had reported and documented corruption at their work place. The NGO was created in early 2012 and at the time of writing included twenty-two individual members. As its president, Višnja Marilović, revealed to me during an August 2012 interview, their activities at that point were primarily oriented towards lobbying for the Law on Protection of the Whistleblowers, a legal act that, as she hoped, would inspire more people who experienced corruption to report.

⁹⁴ Among the most influential ones, it is possible to name the Public Procurement Agency, Procurement Review Body, Audit Office of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Audit Offices of both of the Entities (RS and FBiH) and the District of Brcko.

Apart from these organizations, the institutional actors included a plethora of NGOs that were concerned more generally with concepts such as ‘democratization,’ ‘civic initiatives,’ and civil society.⁹⁵ Most of these organizations sprung up after the war, in a boom of civil society funding accompanying externally funded projects of democratization (see chapter 4). In spring 2012, two of these relatively less well-known NGOs obtained a three-year grant from the USAID to create a network of NGOs with the aim of encouraging them to form “larger and more inclusive movements by establishing an umbrella network of NGOs and other relevant stakeholders, develop, adopt and enforce existing and new anti-corruption legislation and policies; and create widely known and safe avenues for reporting on corruption, while using all available means of public outreach to raise awareness at the grassroots level.”⁹⁶ The network’s name, Anti-Corruption Civic Organizations’ Unified Network, became used under its handy abbreviation, ACCOUNT. The two founding organizations were Centar za razvoj medija i analize (CRMA, Center for Development of Media and Analysis), an organization concerned with media analyses and providing alternative news source, and a newly formed Association Infohouse, aiming to strengthen and promote informed democratic citizenry and human rights under the heading “information is the oxygen of democracy” (Infohouse 2012).

5.2.1. 'Corruption' as a disease

The ACCOUNT network released its first public media and merchandising products in November 2012, after five months of networking and calls for partnership. The official logo of the campaign was “*otporni na štetu!*,” which can be translated as ‘resistant to *štela*’, or alternatively as ‘*štela*-proof.’ The leaflet with the logo of the campaign, distributed to all NGOs interested in participating

⁹⁵ Eg., COD Luna, Fondacija lokalne demokratije, Infohouse, Inicijativa i civilna akcija – ICVA, Centri civilnih inicijativa, Centar za razvoj civilnog društva, COD Luna, Centar za gradjansku suradnju.

⁹⁶ USAID Fact sheet: Anti-corruption civic organizations’ unified network of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

at the founding assembly on the 19th November 2012, represented corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a medical report. Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ‘patient’, was here exposed to the ‘expert opinion’ presented by an excerpt from an EU Progress report from the year 2011: “Bosnia and Herzegovina is still in the early stage of the anti-corruption fight. Corruption is still widespread in most areas and presents a serious problem across the public and the private sector. Even though there is a legal system, the political will for elimination of this problem remains limited.” The ‘diagnosis’ stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered from chronic corruption. The specialist opinion further suggested that “Bosnia and Herzegovina needs urgent hospitalization at the intensive care unit.” The recommended therapy involved prescribing ACCOUNT as a medicine, speeding up the procedure of creating and implementing of the Strategy and the Action Plan developed by the Agency, carrying out specialization in anti-corruption of the public officials and improvement of cooperation with the police, as well as ensuring the efficient work of the Agency for Prevention and the Coordinated Fight against Corruption.

The image of ‘corruption as a disease’ from which Bosnia suffered, was completed in speeches of the key protagonists within the network. One such example of how this came about involved an early November 2012 opening conference of ACCOUNT. The audience in Hotel Europe in Sarajevo, where the event took place, was greeted by Eldin and David Barth, director of USAID’s mission to BiH, EU representatives, head of State Investigation and Protection Agency and Head of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordinated Fight against Corruption. In his speech, David Barth proclaimed corruption to be the ‘biggest evil of modern time.’ He further emphasized the role of civil society in the prevention and fight against corruption, saying that “for a successful fight against corruption in Bosnia, the formation and active work of an anti-corruption network of NGOs is of special importance. This also presents a big leap forward in democratization

of the society and a strong momentum in the systemic fight against corruption.” In Goffman's typology, this encounter exhibited clear ceremonial features with the protagonists finding a way of how to translate up.

Staged for both an international and local audience, the opening event of the ACCOUNT network exposed the framing that the local actors chose to resonate with international funding priorities. This meant framing of corruption as a ‘disease,’ Bosnia as a ‘patient,’ and accepting the discourse of corruption as the ‘biggest evil.’ Discoursing Bosnia in this way formed the basis for denying Bosnia democratic statehood and EU accession.⁹⁷ At the same time, the slogan ‘*otporni na štela*’ denotes an attempt to address the local audience with a term that is part of the ‘cultural intimacy’ (Herzfeld 1997) of a nation, implying that the intimate traits of such knowledge can be willfully resisted. This, in the context of the previous vignette in which one of the leaders of the Account movement puts *štela* on a par with corruption, frames *štela* as an inherently malign practice, one that needs to be eradicated in order for the state/society to be cured of its illness. As the next sections will show, such a presumption was in direct contrast with how the actors within the movement themselves thought of *štela*, as well as with how informality was conceived by those who had actively resisted behavior labeled as corrupt.

5.2.2. International audience

In July 2012, just before my contract with the OSCE expired, I witnessed the first meeting between the representatives and the non-governmental anti-corruption network (ACCOUNT). The encounter illustrated the process of negotiation of roles, concepts and power relations that shaped the official anti-corruption discourse from then on. The meeting took place in Vatra, a Grbavica-

⁹⁷ Similar point has been made by Chandler (2006, 2007) and Coles (2007).

located café across the river from UNITIC towers, Matea and I decided to walk there, with Andrea joining us later after some other duties. On the way, when I asked Matea what this meeting was supposed to be about, she responded that she did not know, as their e-mail request did not specify an agenda, “but probably just the usual, meet and greet,” she hypothesized. The Section was at times approached by NGOs asking for project funding, and this could have been the case. As we arrived, we found the three representatives sitting just outside of the café at a round plastic table, with a view of the Grbavica socialist neighbourhood landscape. They were all dressed formally, sipping their morning coffee already and the only man present was lighting up a cigarette. One of the women knew Matea and took care of the introductory formalities: soon names, handshakes and business cards were exchanged between Eldin, the appointed leader of the initiative, and director of one of the associated NGOs, CRMA, his assistant Aleksandra, and Dženana, representative of the other associated NGO, Infohouse.

Matea showed enthusiasm about the ACCOUNT initiative and opened the meeting by congratulating the present members on the big grant they had been awarded by the USAID. Shortly after, we were joined by Andrea in an extravagant yet highly informal two-piece outfit – one of those that were usually frowned upon by Matea who considered them too revealing, eccentric and highly inappropriate for someone in a senior position⁹⁸. Meeting and greeting was resumed, after which Aleksandra briefly explained that they wanted to introduce us to what the project was about and see if there would be any common ground for co-operation. Even after Andrea’s arrival, the

⁹⁸ Andrea herself was on many occasions critical of the, in her view, absurd ways the OSCE projects were formulated and implemented on the local ground. She expressed her revolt against the strictures of the OSCE office speak both verbally and non-verbally. Despite her effort to pursue meaningful, locally grounded projects, the repertoire of policy choices available to her through the Mission was limited. One of the non-verbal codes she chose to express difference from other OSCE 'internationals' was through an unorthodox choice of designer clothing. This, however, from the perspective of the local co-workers and project partners, still communicated power and privilege.

meeting continued in Bosnian. Andrea, in broken Bosnian, jumped in clarifying that the OSCE at that stage did not have any funds with which to support these initiatives, but that on the other hand the Section had a functioning group of watchdog coalitions and ten youth councils that had been established within the Local First initiative. Andrea emphasized that “this [was] no big money [coming from the OSCE to support the themed NGO alliances]”.

Eldin had welcome Andrea’s idea to meet the OSCE’s watchdog coalitions at the end of August but also threw in another idea. Well oriented in the international parole, he suggested organizing a conference for the donors (*donatorska konferencija*), where the needs of ‘the ground’ would be translated up to the donor community. Eldin said he was afraid that the agenda of the movement could easily be twisted by the dictates “from above” and that the priorities of the EU and USAID would take over those of the associated NGO members. Everyone was dependent on funding and he implied that tailor-made projects were the reality of the civil society sector in Bosnia but that it was a question of strong, united voice: “they [the donor community] must not notice that we are not strong enough.” Appearing to be strong and coherent was one of the strategies the network used in translating up the priorities of their movement. The *donatorska konferencija* was offered as a stage where the language of the internationals could be learned and navigated.

After the meeting, the local counterparts followed suit and approached representatives of the OSCE as owners of a certain expertise, in this case one on establishment of ‘watchdog teams’ and expressed their ambition to become OSCE’s partner – an ambition that was initially rejected by Andrea, who mentioned that the Section had already signed one such partnership. She, however, remained open to possible informal cooperation, aware of the fact that the Account project had recently been awarded substantial funding from another international donor agency. The non-verbal signals enhanced the verbal negotiation of roles and power statuses at the table. Eldin,

however, attempted to shift the situation in his favour, by referring to the areas which, as he hoped, gave local actors an advantage.

From a Goffmanian perspective, this encounter belonged to a 'front stage' performance, where all of the actors were using concepts familiar to the international audience and catered to the ear of the international donors. A large part of this performance, even if tacitly, revolved around redistribution of resources: this was the motivation for the representatives of the network to learn and adopt the language of the internationals.

Epistemological collapse

The way the translating up process came about was revealed in more intimate settings and in one-on-one conversations with individual members of the movement. In an early August 2012 interview, Eldin opened up about switching between the emic and etic registers and the role it played for the movement. His office was on the 10th floor in the city center, opposite the BBI on Marsala Tita street. Similarly to many other NGOs' headquarters, the organization's premises were located in a converted flat. Eldin received me in a converted living room. He was a tall, strongly built man in his late forties, but he spoke with a surprisingly quiet voice for a man of such an impressive body stature. Instead of waiting for the first question, he started with a standard opening, giving me the overview of how the organization had evolved from a self-sustainable media project publishing research on social issues.

At the beginning of the conversation, he fully endorsed the language of international research reports on corruption levels, identifying corruption as something that "we" have here, and providing standard typologies found in political science textbooks: "we divide corruption into 'big', 'small', 'systemic,' 'endemic.'" The roots of corruption were, according to him, in his fellow

Bosnians' ignorance. He expressed the ambition to educate citizens to make them realize the wrong-doings that persisted in society:

[M]y opinion on corruption is that it is present on all levels. We cannot function without corruption... I would consider it a success if Bosnia and Herzegovina was in three to five years where Croatia is now, but obviously this is still far from happening. This is the milieu (*ambijent*) we live in, the political circumstances (...) but the main problem with corruption is that people are not aware of its essence, because the politicians have stirred up the water (*zamutili su vodu*) so that the corruption reached the systemic level. So for the people we have to draw it [as a picture], bring it down to the level of children.

Assuming that Bosnians were “like children” who needed to be educated by the NGOs, and presumably also the ‘international community’ on what corruption was and how the *sistem* worked, was in Eldin’s staged narrative accompanied by the figure of a ‘normal, moral person’ who, unlike “celebrities and politicians” did not have the resources, in terms of personal connections, to get a preferential treatment in hospitals and public offices:

You know, for example, Goran Bregovic? The rockstar. So, he was filmed as going to the doctor’s for a CT examination, which is something that typically a normal, moral person has to wait for, get on a waiting list or try to sneak in somehow. And he is taken directly without waiting lists, somehow. So, the people who made this film wanted to publicly demonstrate how this is a case of corruption which people in the country don’t realize. They are simply not aware that this is not normal. This should not be happening. They think this is how the system works. If I need something, I will have to seek out a connection, to overcome this long line, to get higher on the waiting list. If Bregovic shows up, he will automatically get better treatment, how is this possible?

Despite the fact that a similar situation would in an informal setting be most likely labelled as *štela*, Eldin here collapsed the two terms into a case of ‘corruption.’ When I pointed this out to him and asked if he had seen any difference between *štela* and corruption, he said: “no, they are the same thing.” The reason why he had used the word in the campaign was, as he framed it, ‘pure public relations’: “the idea was, in the media campaign, to bring the concept of corruption closer to people, because they really don’t understand, so we thought they could relate to the term *štela*

better. (...) [O]f course, at the official meetings, and with donors, we stick to ‘corruption’ because that is how the official measurements are always done.”

The existence of two terms for the same act – *štela* for the local audience and corruption for the internationals – was spelled out by Eldin when he explained how the ACCOUNT project was formulated: “of course, the international community falls right into this, and in many ways: all of the anti-corruption activities are meant to fulfil the requirements of the international community – they create the system. “ During our conversation, Eldin gradually shifted towards a more honest expression of his view on the internationals:

At the international level, there is a great disinterest in solving the problem. How it works here is, for example, that if in 2008 some problem gets defined, it takes more than two years and only in 2010 something gets implemented, while conditions of course might have changed. How policies get formulated at the international level, it pretty much defines what the local level, or call it the NGOs, will be doing here in a few years. For example now, everyone is all of a sudden interested in the anti-corruption fight, because Americans now put anti-corruption on their priority list in terms of funding. But (...) many of the projects are purely declaratory.

This narrative illuminates in detail how concepts found their way in the translating up process, in the hope of making a living in the civil society industry. Apart from what Stubbs (2007, 2013) describes as the common fallacies of the 'civil society' sector in the Balkans, this dynamic also played into hollowing out the institutional efforts at state-building (cf. 3.4.). As the next section will show, translating up, however, was conducted not only through embodying certain concepts, but also through roles staged for the domestic and international audience.

5.2.3. Local audience

Even if the internationals were not physically present, the official meetings were intended for an international audience. Hence, performance for local audience usually took place in between meetings, in coffee breaks, in the ‘back stage’ or in narratives and self-portrayals for the media. In

the absence of other ‘internationals,’ participant members of the anti-corruption movement devised a different set of rhetorical tools. In this context, it is useful to look at the roles that individuals were playing.

Narratives that I collected among the members of ACCOUNT movement, in particular the associated Whistleblowers, were indicative of the portrayals of self in the context of *štela*, (anti-) corruption, and the process of translating up. Those who had reported cases of corruption and embezzlement and published their stories in the public, faced, in the eyes of local news readership, ambiguous reactions, ranging from ridicule to contempt. As we saw in the story of Dejan in Chapter 2, being called an idiot (*budala*), was a minimum reaction such behavior could trigger. As diverse as their personal stories were, in-depth recorded and informal interviews with ‘whistleblowers’ reveal several common denominators when it came to local understandings of the corruption-*štela* boundary, attitudes towards the role of ‘internationals’, self-portrayals of resistance to the ‘system’, and sources of pride and embarrassment. Based on both official and unofficial contact with the associated whistleblowers, the way their stories of resistance to corruption/*štela* became narrated and re-narrated embodied one – or a mixture – of several tropes. All of the informants mentioned in this chapter who chose to publicize their case embraced and narrated their story with a certain air that became indicative of the way they responded to and re-created the *štela*/corruption boundary. While initially it seemed that the “victim” and the “hero” form a binary, elements of these two archetypes were present in most narratives. The “entrepreneur” here refers to the figure that embodies street-smarts, the ability to navigate the ‘system’, ‘knowing [what is best] for oneself’ (*zna za sebe*), characteristics that enable one to fight the ‘system’ from within: this cognitive paradox encompassed in one of the following narratives

demonstrates how it is possible both to formally fight ‘corruption’ and at the same time find joy, pride and mischief in *štela*.

The Whistleblowers association provided a platform for individuals who had reported corruption in Bosnia. They were also one of the founding members of the ACCOUNT network. My access to the group members was initially enabled through the ACCOUNT network’s workshop on watchdog methodology in lobbying for the whistleblower protection law on the 20th March 2013, co-organized by the OSCE. Over the period of February to July 2013, this led to further encounters with those members who lived in Sarajevo and were available to become informants.

5.2.4. Roles in the *sistem*

In the following, *sistem* as frequently mentioned by informants comes on board as a signifier for both the formal system and informal system. The formal is seen as dysfunctional, while the latter is perceived as functionally, externally despised yet internally accepted *sistem*. The term (litt., 'system') was present in nearly every conversation I had on the subject of corruption, *štela* and informality, and at first seemed confusing: at times, it seemed that informants were referring to the formal, legal system and its malfunctioning (such as in Dejan’s attempts to “find a hole in the system”); at other times, it seemed that the signified of the ‘system’ was synonymous with *štela* (as in Višnja’s account of internationals “blending into the system” in chapter 2). Eventually, it became clearer that at least in my local interlocutors’ conceptual universe, the word proved coterminous with both, thus presenting a mid-step in the process of translating up. Within a set of angles from which the local actors could have narrated their story, they chose a certain angle which fell into three figures embraced by the protagonists.

5.2.4.1. *The Victim: Narrative of suffering and abuse*

Višnja was an employee of a publicly owned company Center for Culture and Sports Skenderija (hereinafter referred to as ‘Skenderija’). In 2011, she reported an embezzlement of three million convertible marks, lost her job and reported revenge by her former employer. Her story is the most notoriously known one in the media and has been repeated *ad nauseam* at most official meetings of the Account network. Even after so many repetitions, the way Višnja tells the events that led to her dismissal from the company appear far from being routine practice. When I first heard Višnja narrating her story to an audience of some twenty participants from the NGO sector and random guests at the workshop in Hotel Hollywood in Ilidza, she was still visibly shaken – her bodily gestures, appearance and tone gave out signs of resignation, frustration, nervousness, fear, yet determination. Chain-smoking during breaks in the official program and throughout our chats and interviews, with sunken cheeks and tired eyes, this forty-something year old woman for many became an embodiment of a ‘whistleblower’ portrayed in the media. The reaction she seemed to elicit from the audience at ACCOUNT workshops was one of sympathy and fascination, both for her courage and with the horrors that she has been through. Her key message to the audience was always a discouragement to follow her case, in order to avoid the suffering that she in details describes, such as being threatened by her former boss, divorce and other difficulties in her private life and the life of her two children being endangered and consequently having a 24/7 police escort.

At the first Account meeting which I entered still as partially associated with the OSCE, Višnja emphatically agreed to an interview and to an appearance in my Public Policy class. Our interview meeting finally happened on a sunny Wednesday in May, in front of the Alta shopping center and just next to the UNITIC buildings. As this location was often used for official business meetings by the ‘internationals’, it seemed to somehow reinforce the divide between the two of us. Višnja

came accompanied by Nejra, the energetic PR manager who was in charge of an earlier workshop. Nejra seemed casual and relaxed – as she was finishing her *burek* breakfast straight out of the paper – but seemed to be taking charge in staging the performance for a researcher.

Having been educated as an economist, Višnja has worked in accounting and finance all her life. In 1999, which she describes as “a beautiful year of prosperity in which we thought everything was only going to get better, a year of reconstruction, build-up, hope, things getting better in this country,” she saw an advertisement for a vacancy in the Skenderija complex, where her earlier work place was also situated. This position was for a procurement-financial accountant. Everything went well until 2006 when a new director was appointed to the presidency of the Skenderija complex. Until then, as Višnja remembers, “everything was in order: salaries were being paid regularly, the firm prospered. Until the arrival of Mr. Dzindo, when everything got a different twist, until where we can see Skenderija heading now.” As her job description was mostly about documentation of finances and procurement, she saw it as her duty to report on any deviations and abnormalities:

Aside from internal rules in the firm, we are responsible for inspections, which according to the law come to our department, not the technical department, to abide by the law on financial business and income. Documentation is on the table, I must react. Of course, first I hoped these were just mistakes. The director was an engineer, not a financial specialist, so we thought this was lack of experience. However, as time passed by, I realized that these were not mistakes but a systemic way of getting money out of Skenderija, and thus a systemic corruption and since everything went downhill and I did not want to be in this club. I found myself also responsible and decided to document all of this because I had the access and the duty to warn the prosecution of Canton Sarajevo to stop this practice.

Talking about the reactions of people around her, she elaborates on how she first felt protected against any abuse and judgement, but later left alone with three of her co-workers who at the time stood behind her:

I was a labor unionist, and until we just talked about it, everyone was supporting me. Even when our salaries were not paid, they were supportive. But however, when the police came, the retaliation began. People just took distance in that moment, and we were left alone. In these situations, a mass of people, I think that mass of people cannot bring a good change. Because in that situation when you need to take a risk, you will stay alone. So the three of us were left alone, at their mercy.. they were afraid the same does not happen to them. Definitely, people around us were afraid.

Ideas and discourses of victimhood and suffering affected a large part of Bosnian public life and were conceived of by members of the anti-corruption movement as an effective role to be taken on in translating up to the internationals. Anthropologists of post-war Bosnia have argued that portrayals of extended suffering play an important part in placing moral claims on state and its welfare system (Helms 2013, Henig 2012). Wagner (2008) applies the concept of 'hierarchies of suffering' to illustrate the social dynamics of competitive claim-placing among ethnic group, communities and villages. In Bosnia of 2012-2013, scope of this strategy, however, exceeded groups of entitlement related to the war and spilled over to a discourse that appealed to the general public and the internationals. In Butlerian, rather than Goffman's, sense, this suffering had a performative quality: it was what was put on display, a public persona presented to the world in response to what was considered as accepted and expected behavior.

5.2.4.2. *The Hero: Pride in beating the 'system'*

Osman Pekarić is an energetic, tall, fifty-something bearded man, dressed in a sporty-elegant blue T-shirt, and in his words, the 'first whistleblower' in the country. Our first meeting happened in February at the workshop, where he was invited by the organizers. It took place in the lobby of Holiday Inn, a hotel that once served as the headquarters of international journalists and aid workers during the war. Osman came one minute before the scheduled beginning of our meeting, with a broad smile, giving a completely different impression than Višnja: not one of a victim, but one of a hero, a winner. This was enhanced also during his speech, with frequent references to

‘humanity’, human concerns, God and duty. Osman was fully aware that he was one of the most visible of the whistleblowers, and seemed to take pride in it. He came prepared with copies of newspaper articles and other documents that support his cause. During the interview, Osman several times mentioned his religious affiliation and eclecticism as sources of his deeds – he asked me about my religion and mentioned God several times, but also said that being Catholic or Orthodox does not matter. He had a tendency to lecture – during the interview, he casually dropped in several comments on his conception of democracy, saying that in democracy nobody should threaten other people and “one must raise his voice.” Unlike Višnja, who seemed tired of talking about her case, Osman seemed to take pride in narrating his story.

The Muslim Charity Organization “Merhamet” (Muslimsko dobrotvorno drustvo Merhamet) is one of the three religious charity associations that were the major channel through which donations from local but mostly international donors were supposed to first alleviate the suffering of the war-affected population and then help reconstruct the country after the war. Not surprisingly, Merhamet was a recipient of donations coming predominantly from Islamic countries, with the United Arab Emirates being the most significant donor in the after-war period (1996-2010). Merhamet was supposed to finance individual projects as well as create enterprises, such as a breeding center for goats in Bugojno, and reconstruction of mosques and medresas, but it also got involved in privatization (a gas station in Hrasnica) and building houses (Kasindolska and Sepetarevac). All of this was in cooperation with Rijaset of the Islamic Community (*islamska zajednica*). A former high-placed manager in a public firm, Osman, started volunteering at Merhamet – the Muslim Charity Organization – that was accused in 2010 of embezzlement of approximately 50 million BAM (25 million Euro) through the creation of fictive enterprises, as reviewed by the Federal Financial Police.

Merhamet is a heavily partisan organization. Nearly all of the members, in fact, all of the members apart from me are members of the SDA. That is the same like when all of the employees of Caritas are from HDZ, and most people in Dobrotvor are from SDS.⁹⁹ I joined after the war, because I wanted to do good – my motivations were purely human. That is what God asks of you – to help a man in need. So, I came to Merhamet with this naïve idea of helping and they wanted me because I was in quite a high position at the time. I was not in a party and they needed someone like this.”

However, as he soon realized, “of the 100% that the charity was supposed to distribute, only 30% would go towards people... meaning 70% stayed in the hands of administrators.” Asking how he became a part of the organization, he says “they” heard about him and thought he was an expert. He became a director and spent a total of five years with the organization. In this position, he saw that the executive board was embezzling the charity’s funds for their private purposes. Namely, at some point the president of the board had more responsibility than he had in decision-making, which he saw as an injustice that was carried out with the aim to circumvent him and obscure their misuse of the charity funds. The ‘problem’ started, as he explains, when he first started to give written notices and reports, after everyone expected him to keep silent and not to draw attention to the embezzlements. Then, as he says, they transferred him from the place of director to a more marginal function. In 2003, he reported the cases to prosecutors and then a series of media articles followed. Proudly, he thus portrayed himself as the ‘oldest’ whistleblower and one who later connected with Višnja, as well as with Eldin and Dejan, thus initiating the civil society response to the problem.

⁹⁹ Caritas is a pastoral and charity institution of the Catholic church; HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, in English, Croatian Democratic Union) refers to a Croatian political party founded in 1989 with a strong presence in Herzegovina and Croat-dominated parts of Bosnia; Dobrotvor is a Serbian humanitarian association based in Sarajevo; SDS (Srpska demokratska stranka, in English, Serbian Democratic Party) is a political party found in 1991 representing the interests of Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-1995 conflict and since then the strongest party in the Republic of Srpska.

5.2.4.3. *The angered martyr: diagnosed as a justice fighter*

Teufik's role-taking strategy was similar to Osman's in its religious undertones, a narrative of human duty and successful resistance towards the 'system', yet in other respects it approaches the 'martyr' trope. Teufik's case of reported 'corruption' at the Faculty of Political Science became an often referred to case of corruption in the education sector. In 2010, Teufik was studying international relations in a Master's program at the Faculty of Political Sciences, following the newly implemented Bologna system. In this program, students who had graduated from a 4-year long bachelor's degree could sign up for a one-year master's degree. That already, in his statement, was the first breach of law. More importantly, he and his wife were charged 5500KM, just like the other six hundred students, which according to him was against legal regulation that allowed the university to charge only 1000KM. He reported this as a case of corruption and sued the dean of the Faculty, prof. Mirko Pejanovic. Being used to talking to the media, he came to our meeting at the Buybook café prepared with what seemed to be a standard interview toolkit – a paper dossier containing his formal complaints and materials documenting his case.

Teufik is a tall skinny man in his mid-thirties wearing a long cotton shirt often worn by practicing Muslims. During the interview he revealed the suffering that pursuing his cause has inflicted on his family – his wife's miscarriage, his insomnia, his dismissal from the faculty, and threats and insults directed at him at a public hearing at the faculty, such as the dean asking him if he can sleep well, calling him an idiot and a fool (*budala* and *budaletina*)¹⁰⁰.

¹⁰⁰ Unusually, he also got a strange medical report in which he was diagnosed as a 'justice fighter' (in orig. "*borac za pravdu*"). Teufik brought this document with him to our interview and told me how having this report in his records would mark him negatively for life.

Even though officially a part of the Account/Whistleblower movement, Teufik openly despises “the NGO circles”, claiming that “these people just do things for no other purpose than spending the money they got.” According to him, workshops and roundtables lead absolutely nowhere. Similarly, he detests the clique of the faculty’s management, referring to them as the “academic criminal octopus” (*akademska kriminalna hobotnica*) with its arms reaching to politics, prosecution and private business. His notion of the morals and ethics that are being sent as an example to students at the faculty is similarly radical: “it is as if prostitutes were lecturing on decency.” Teufik's narrative complements the spectrum of emotions displayed as part of the anti-corruption fight with fierceness and anger.

The three role types, victim, hero and angered martyr, represent a dynamic in which someone is at odds with the 'system' in this case representing a narrative mid-step between emic and etic terms related to use of informality. While these tropes are based in an emotional engagement with the 'system', the following one forms an antidote to them in that it represents a very pragmatic approach to translating up informality.

5.2.4.4. The Entrepreneur: Having a nose for the right people

Dejan, whose view of *štela* as a mischievous and playful practice was featured in chapter 2, stands out as an energetic, outspoken entrepreneur, jack-of-all trades, active in many areas reaching from politics, consultancy, non-governmental to the tourism industry. He is the founding member of one of the few political parties in B&H that are without direct ethnic affiliation. In 2010 he resigned from the post of its president, which, as he explained, is a practice antithetical to what most politicians in Bosnia would do. As he comments, “if you look around Bosnia and Herzegovina, all parties are leadership-based, based on the single ruling of one person, and that just brings democracy down in our country.” He established the NGO COD Luna and has been its acting

director until the time of our interview. Aside from COD Luna and its engagement in anti-corruption, he also has a consultancy business working in the same field, oriented at governmental and private clients. A father of four active in many fields, he takes pride in knowing ‘for himself’ and being able to navigate the *sistem*. References to street-smartness, in terms of intimate cultural knowledge, are present in his unofficial narrative, just like more and more business ideas that he keeps casually dropping into the conversation.

Speaking about how he became the ‘chief’ whistleblower, he gives an account from his home village.

You know, in my village, where I was born and my family still lives there – Rudi it is called – we had this neighbor, Milovan, he lived in a house just next to us, was elderly, a pensioner. And this Milovan he would look around the whole day... noticing stuff, and one day he noticed that the mayor was doing something fishy. He noticed that the new system of waste collection in the village, that the mayor was supposed to coordinate, was not happening as it should, and he went an instance higher and was trying to make him accountable for it. Well, naturally, he got into trouble because at that time there was no system, no way to complain about the administration. So I came to him and offered him 250 marks, and he was a pensioner, so this would basically double his pension, if he cooperates with me to set up people’s offices, that’s how we called them, at that time there were only five in the country, where people could report anything they had to say about the conduct of public officials.

Later on, Dejan accidentally got to hear about a website where people who reported corruption and got advice on legal protection. A few months later, again accidentally, Dejan met a U.S. lawyer, expert on whistleblower protection, who offered him a meeting after which they found a common whistleblower project. Steven, the lawyer, finally convinced him that improving the legal framework was what was needed the most. Since then Dejan had been approached by individuals who had reported corruption and wanted to become members of the association. However, not all of them approached him with honest motivations - some of them, as he says, clearly wanted to take revenge on their employer or misinterpreted the facts.

The four roles described above represent ideal types of communication strategies embraced by local actors in their endeavor to translate up the local meanings of informality. Adoption of front stage discourses and etic concepts in the process of translating resulted in a particular notion of state-building that resonated with the idea of fake institutionalism. The following section illustrates the effects of this meaning transmission and discusses the emergence of *ko fol* state-building.

5.3. *Ko fol* state-building

The official discourses on corruption created within Account portrayed corruption as a disease, as the society's biggest evil that needed to be eradicated, as well as the epistemological collapse stemming from overtaking completely the experience-distant discourse on corruption and its typologies. The backstage snapshots collected during informal interactions with local interlocutors offered a contrasting perspective on the types of actors, relations and meanings that emerged in the anti-corruption discourse. Complementing the subversiveness of local responses at the official meetings and workshops, this section showcases the formation of the unofficial discourse in the 'back yard' of the movement. In other words, what was said and thought when the lights are off, during a ride back home from an official event, or exchanged at a lunch break.

Similarly to Wedeen's (1999) politics of 'as if' in Asad's Syria, Bosnians' compliance with the formal state structure were to a large extent faked – the overbureaucratization of most aspects of administrative encounter in both national and international organizations was by some held accountable for the lack of trust in the 'formal'. According to my interview with Aida Vežić (09-12-2011), this issue pointed at the clash between international and local perspectives: while in the West, high demands placed on application were a sign of transparent procedure, in Bosnia these signified the direct opposite. A high number of required documents was often seen as a disincentive to apply or as a signal of the agency's autonomous and arbitrary decision over selection leading to

denied access. In the first case, a common complaint of NGOs noticed by Fagan (2010), Howard (2011) and Vezic is that rejected applicants seldom obtained feedback on the grounds of rejection, and if they did, in some examples they had cited their applications rejected as incomplete when missing a one-page document out of a 150-page required documentation (Howard 2011: 110) or not getting feedback even after direct request (Fagan 2010). This left room in the recipients' community for interpreting such behavior in the context of local bureaucratic practices, i.e. as pre-arranged set-ups going usually to the same group of large, urban-based NGOs mostly in Sarajevo.

The issue of the 'usual crowd,' a group of NGO leaders that attend the same seminars and events, connects also to another stigma of the professionalized NGO sector: the leader-centered, personality-based type of management carried out in these organizations. This in practice means that in the NGO community and outside of it, particular organizations do not get referred to by their official name, but by the name of their leader, which also reflects the strong connection between the personality of the director and the public image, sources of funding and networks of the given NGO. Clientelism and the role of networks are explicitly mentioned in expert analyses of big donor projects, such as those of the EU. Fagan (2010: 82) for instance notes that the EU delegation invariably works with the same NGOs in each round, which are informally referred to by the EC managers as "our clients", who are typically "well established and connected" (2010: 99) and create a 'magic circle' (Howard 2011: 114) which remains impenetrable to outsiders and newcomers.

Overbureaucratization and the 'usual crowd' were parts of the *ko fol* discourse which influenced the identities and social roles that are assigned to formal actors through the prism of informality. As observed within the ACCOUNT movement, the effects of the discourse are threefold. Firstly, from the viewpoint of the local actors, international decisions on problem identification,

implementation modalities and project evaluation are deemed as arbitrary, and all official documenting strategies are a mere *pro forma*. Secondly, the “international-local” binary was ontologically substantiated in the minds of ‘locals;’ however, the clear-cut dichotomy was blurred by the category of local consultants, who had “sneaked in” to the world of ‘internationals’, copying ‘their’ strategies and forming a link in the binary. Third, it was believed that decisions on donor funding, objectives of intervention and selection of key local partners were based on connections (*ko je s kim dobar*, i.e. who are you on good terms with), just like the practice of assigning consultancy positions within the democratization community based on friendship, and combination of profit and non-profit activities assistance-related entrepreneurship.

"The King is Naked": De-divinizing the internationals

The following excerpt from a conversation in Dejan’s car distills the *ko fol* discourse and the way the donor community became entangled and interpreted through the optics of *štela*. Driving from a workshop meeting in Hotel Sarajevo located in the outskirts of the city, Dejan and Jelena, his colleague from the Whistleblower Association, one of the key members of Account network, shared their impressions and complaints from the meeting. Dejan first said that he was annoyed about a conversation he had just had with Lejla, the blond lady who spoke a few words on behalf of the European Commission, mentioning the need for systematic and well-implemented evaluation of the anti-corruption projects. He seemed disturbed by his assumption that evaluations of project proposals on the donor side were carried out by people who, according to him, had no legitimate grounds on which to judge them:

There’s no way how people who have never worked in this area can know ‘*šta valja*’ (‘what is good’) and what not. They have some indicators of their own, and they are trying to assess how well we identify problems. How can they ever know if the way *we* identify *our*

problem is relevant or not? For example, I would never dare to judge proposals outside of my very narrow sphere of specialization.

Jelena agreed with him, nodding, “the EU Commission people have some system of awarding projects on the scale of 5 to 10, just like at school. But, there is no way of knowing what passes for 5, what passes for 10, what passes at all. There is no feedback, no guideline based on which their decisions are made. These are some sort of attempts at formalizing this procedure, making it more transparent, but in the end it is totally *ko fol*.” At this point, both Jelena and Dejan speak with a mixture of passion, disdain and anger. Dejan, who is in the driver’s seat and tries to keep his eyes on the road but gestures dramatically with his right hand, starts to elaborate on how it works in this business – with the obvious conclusion: in the end, the funding that you get for any project depends on who you know rather than on some transparent criteria.

Dejan's narrative in the car revealed one of the key functions of the *ko fol* filter: that of debunking the self-portrayed moral exclusiveness of the internationals. The internationals, from a perspective of privilege and power, assumed a moral dichotomy (cf. chapter 3) of those whose deeds were sanctioned, the powerful, the 'divine', as opposed to the locals who were erring humans, or children, to be educated toward democracy and Europeaness (Coles 2007, Gilbert 2008, Chandler 2000, 2006). In the eyes of the locals, however, the metaphorical king was naked: there was no difference between *us* and *them*.

It is inevitable that Dejan’s car monologue was part of a performance that was staged for me as an international audience. The point he wanted to bring across was the following: everyone uses *štela* to allocate donor resources, and while we (the locals) are at least honest and being open about it, the internationals hide their *štela* behavior behind a set of formal rules and procedures which, in the end, boiled down to be *ko fol*, faked, as if.

This was not the end of the story, however, as Dejan and Jelena got passionate about this conversation and as we had long passed by their Grbavica-located office where they initially intended to go. As we passed my apartment on Marindvor and were driving on, further into the center, Dejan, intrigued by my question about who were these people, explained these were, in fact *lokalci*:

[S]ee, that is exactly what I ask myself. These are some kind of people who knew some English in 1996, after the war, and they sneaked in (*uvukli su se*) to all the international organizations. So they remained there but they have absolutely no idea about the projects they are judging.

Recalling the concept of internationality as a category of practice (cf. chapter 3) and Baker's (2013) article on projectariat, Dejan portrayed the identity of *lokalci* negatively as those who had left the *normalno, pošteno* (lit. normal, honest) grounds of Bosnian sociality, in order to plunge into the world of international organizations and started to do things *ko fol* instead of in an open, "honest" way. Dejan also explained the connection between *lokalci* and the international circles:

But you know, how it works usually, I mean how these project indicators and priorities become formulated. So there is this guy Pavol who is from Slovenia, who gets hired as a consultant. He comes from Slovenia, writes up the project priorities and some *ko fol* analysis of the situation. But Pavol is on good terms with Brigita who has a consultancy firm in Slovenia which usually implements these projects, so Pavol is going to ring up Brigita and write the project the way that Brigita's company seems like the best match to do it. Then Brigita applies together with someone from Greece and then they invite to seminars only people who they are comfortable with and we are out of the game."

Being driven all the way to the other part of the city, I wished to continue our conversation over a lunch, but as if they suddenly woke up, Dejan and Jelena realized they had to go back to the office for some further meetings. Dropping me off by the Sebilj fountain, we said our good-byes.

Dejan's expose of how exactly democratization projects worked and what role personal channels played in allocation of donor aid was unusually thorough and detailed. However, what he so clearly

spelled out during our car drive, was emblematic of how relationships between the internationals and locals were framed in the minds of Bosnians. These relationships enabled the thriving of the 'NGO mafia' (Savija 2013) and led to development of projects and activities that everyone perceived as nonsensical and *ko fol*. Dejan's blatant take on how the internationals blended with the 'system,' ridding them of their exclusionary, quasi-divine pedestal paralleled other informants' more subtle interpretations.

In Višnja's account, the 'internationals' behaved differently than they would in their home countries:

Another thing is, unfortunately, Bosnia and Herzegovina became populated with not only locals but also (...) with foreigners (*stranci*), who after they came here, after a certain time, they blend into this mental pattern of ours, or actually, see, when you are out, let's say in the EU, some things are not acceptable, even though they are not prohibited by law, but they are unacceptable based on ethical codex of behavior.

Contrary to Eldin's front stage narrative (see section 3.2.) in which he suggested that Bosnians needed to be treated as children and educated about what 'corruption' means, Višnja was convinced that 'corruption' was just another empty signifier (*šuplja priča*) imported from the West, to ostracize and irritate Bosnians:

I can only say what I think the foreigners should do. I would be happiest if they actually could do something, but it is mostly some declaratory talk (...) about the fight against corruption, and that became so, so irritating to a common person, (...) and nothing happens. It is not that it becomes the same but it is every day worse. To us, the word corruption became irritating. (...) Those strong billboards, they are truly disgusting and irritating.

Apart from the 'disgust' with the officially accepted, yet privately despised, discourse of 'corruption as the biggest evil', Višnja and Dejan in their intimate accounts complemented the backstage assumptions and attitudes towards 'internationals' blending into the system, consultancy contracts and project implementation being awarded in a circle of acquaintances reaching from the EU

institutions and other international donors. In one of our encounters, Višnja expressed bitterness over the *ko fol* international experts who had made a living in the Bosnian democratization industry:

[A] gigantic amount of money is being channeled down to Bosnia through the European Commission and all sorts of organizations [and] contracts. You come from a country that has entered the EU [referring to my home country, Czech Republic], but we were together on the other side for many years. And now, all sorts of experts [come from these countries]. A huge amount of this money comes for these foreign experts – for these consultancy firms. I don't want to offend anyone, but I think that neither Bosnia, the Czech [Republic], Slovakia, nor Serbia lag behind in capacity, intellectual knowledge and everything else behind countries of the EU. However, they [the EU] have seen here a fertile ground to make money, but (...) actually only a small proportion of this money stays in Bosnia. Most of it goes back to the countries where it came from.

As the encounters with the associated whistleblowers as well as other civil society employees show, there was resentment and a sense of injustice felt towards people who had built up *ko fol* procedures and formalities only to cover up the true nature of international democratization intervention in Bosnia. To the Bosnians, the way things worked in this particular field were no different from how also the local institutions worked: building Potemkin village facades (Allina-Pisano 2008), working through *štela*, and faking adherence to formal procedures. At the same time, the understanding of how things truly worked was not negative, rather it was perceived as human. The perception of grant allocations and formal requirements being *ko fol* did not resonate only in informants' narratives but played out also in verbal and non-verbal signals given in the back-stage of internationally funded workshops. At these events, the formal and informal were entangled, and endorsed in tacit compliance by all participants who differed in the degree to which they 'sabotaged' the official parts of the program.

The particular *ko fol* version of state-building in Bosnia was a result of translating up, revealed in those rare instances when the role-play staged for the international audience switched into more

informal, 'back stage' setting. The strategies that the actors described in this chapter deployed in *translating up*, the adoption of self-victimizing role types, the 'front stage' parole of corruption as a disease contrasting with critique of the corruption discourse in the 'back stage', did not lead to increased empowerment of the local actors and greater local ownership in state-building. On the contrary, they were reinforcing a dependency dynamic in which professionalized NGO sector, acting as 'civil society', catered to the funding needs of the international community.

5.4. Conclusion

In post-Dayton (Mature Dayton) Bosnia of 2012-2013 there was little room for illusion that the democratization strategy of civil society assistance led to the desired effects on state-society cohesion and progress towards EU integration. This was the time when the gap between narratives expressed in the front and back stage of the donor-recipient dynamic revealed impatience with the "as if" procedures of both the local *and* international institutions. Adoption of particular types of discourse at the 'front stage', conceptualizing *štela* and corruption in etic terms and the roles that local actors adopted in their communication upward were an important part of creating the *ko fol* state-building discourse. Through this prism, the local civil society employees (*lokalci*) read all formal requirements and procedures of the donors as inherently fake.

Conclusions: Theoretical and policy implications

In his memoir *To End a War*, Richard Holbrooke (1999) remembers a dinner event in November 1995 in Dayton, Ohio, during which he and four other statesmen, accompanied by their family members, manage to agree on the international boundaries of a country today known as Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Holbrooke vividly describes, in the midst of dinner chatter Alija Izetbegović

and Slobodan Milošević were passing around a paper napkin on which they were drawing and redrawing the current state borders. Somewhere between the main course and the dessert, the formal layout of Dayton Bosnia took its shape. Already from the start, the state in Bosnia was seen as a *ko fol* product of informal bargaining and externally imposed structures.

While state emergence is never a linear, fully clothed or complete process (cf. Sassen 2006, Scott 1998), it is a result not only of the formal mechanisms being in place but a process of everyday negotiation between the governors and the governed. In this process, the way the intentions and policies of the institutions get entangled with people's understandings of the state and their role in it, influence greatly the effect of their implementation. To paraphrase Pickering (2007: 165), if we want to see how state-building projects affect people, we need to start with how people react to them.

This dissertation has explored the intricate relationship between the people and the state, the formal and the informal, in an institutional environment of 'weak' and 'contested' statehood populated by local and foreign actors. The question that drove this research was *how is the boundary between the formal and informal negotiated inside and outside of an international bureaucracy?* In order to carry out this interpretive enquiry, I conducted ethnographic research in three sites in Bosnia. The choice of these sites shed light on the complementary research questions: [1] How do practices of informality and perceived practices of informality influence the type of relations that emerge within the state-building process? [2] How do these relations affect the policy formulation and its implementation on the local ground? And finally, [3] how do the local responses to these policies influence their efficiency?

Answering these questions meant re-examining some of the principal assumptions in contemporary political science literature and proposing a grounded theory of informality as an interpretive filter and communication vehicle that enables the simultaneous processes of *translating up* and *translating down*. The analytical angle taken in this innovative, interdisciplinary study was not one of applying and testing existing theories, but allowing the research material to shed light on existing theories of informality, state-building and international intervention. Hence, the knowledge generated in this research process is anthropological in that it is based on immersion to the lived world of research participants and the emic terms with which they labeled their sociality. These include the practice of *štela*, the interpretive filters of *ubleha* and *ko fol*, the informal organizations of *komšiluk* and *mahala*, the local organizations of MZs and *domovi*, and the informal welfare distribution through *paketi*. Another part of the material, however, brought in observations that are applicable beyond the boundaries of Bosnia. These relate to the communicative and performative processes in state-building 'contact zones' (Pratt 1991), the role of internationality as a category of practice, translation in policy studies and theatricality in institutionalism.

As the findings of my research show, informality on the local ground has many shapes and faces and is not necessarily attributable to one historical period or solely to malfunctioning of the formal state institutions (chapter 2). There are concepts and practices of informality present in external state-building, and while the 'internationals' find their understanding and use of informality to be ethically neutrally and professional, 'locals' see no difference between the foreign concepts and practices, such as networking, and the local ones, such as *štela* (chapter 3). In an interaction between the international state-building and its local counterparts, local intermediaries play a crucial role in the process of *translating down* the etic concepts of informality, considered by the

local transactors inherently as *ubleha* (litt. 'nonsense' or 'bluff'). In this process, the foreign concepts get translated into those local terms that the internationals initially aimed to suppress (chapter 4). In the reverse process of *translating up*, the local actors associated in an anti-corruption civil society network engage in a series of theatrical performances in order to transfer local meanings to the international donors. This adds up to a paradoxical outcome I call *ko fol* state-building (chapter 5), and expands the existing accounts of informality with a grounded theory of the informal prism, and the necessity to pay attention to meaning and its role in policy translation and assemblage (chapter 1).

Theoretical contributions

The theoretical implications of this research reach over four broad areas of investigation: (1) theories of informality in social sciences; (2) critical state-building literature; (3) interpretive policy analysis and critical policy studies; and (4) area studies on the Balkans and Bosnia.

First, when it comes to our understanding of informal institutions and the relationship between state and society, the present research has made several points that disrupt and push our understanding of these boundaries. Scholars investigating informality from institutionalist premises have long relied on the dichotomy between the formal and informal. As we have seen, this dichotomy has been grounded in a set of assumptions about the nature of statehood, its primacy vis-a-vis the informal, the normative bias of considering informal institutions as inherently malign and the researcher's possibility to attribute some effects to formal and some to informal outcomes. As I have argued, those who rely on these assumptions fail to see the fuzzy boundary of the two domains as constantly negotiated by sets of actors imbued with different levels of power. On this front, my research has extended the accounts of informality in current political science

institutionalist literature which has long focused on discrete phenomena, such as corruption, clientelism, and nepotism. Instead of adding to this list of phenomena, the research has explored the possibilities of informality as an interpretive filter. Considering the 'informal' phenomena as conceptually static, I have proposed the 'informal prism' – an analytically valuable tool to understand on-going communicative processes and power dynamics in the zone of contact between the local and the non-local actors. As I have argued, informality as a prism can help us grasp how rule, practices and policies translate into the language of those subjects upon which they are expected to act.

Another contribution is in the realm of critical state-building literature with the concepts of theatricality, performativity and translated intimacy. I introduced several emic concepts which help us understand the nature of state-building and its detriments in contact zones. One such example is *ko fol* state-building that adds to the realm of Potemkin-like phenomena that have been explored in other contexts, such as Syria (Wedeen, 1999), or Ukraine (Allina-Pisano, 2010). In an analytical approach that gives voice to the 'objects' of state-building intervention rather than only its policy and institutional architects, this concept illuminates the nuanced points that make many state-building efforts futile through turning a blind eye to the local perceptions of the institutional interaction as performative and faux. The arena of critical state-building has been further enriched with accounts of *internationality* as a practice. This dissertation has joined a small number of in-depth studies that focus on the lived world of the people working in state-building and their everyday struggles with the bureaucracy. In this manner, it extends the analytical premises of development critiques (Mosse & Lewis, 2005, 2006; Mosse, 2011a, 2011b) into the domain of state-building.

A third contribution is in the area of interpretive policy analysis and critical policy studies. The dissertation has engaged speech acts and adopted the core idea of policies as actants, as deliverers of meanings. Thus, my research has joined the recent move of looking towards the role of translation in policy studies (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2015, Mosse & Lewis, 2005). The contribution in this area has been a careful examination of communicative and translation processes between different types of actors in an international policy formulation and implementation process. I have shown that navigating informality was a key to understanding of how actors translated the contents of international prerogatives to the *lifeworld* of Bosnians. I have further illuminated the crucial role of careful examination of meanings and nodes in the translation process in determining the possible factors that contribute to policy failure or to dubious results of policy-making efforts. In this regard, the research goes one step further than what Pero (2011: 244) framed as the need to engage with the way the governed help create policies by expressing their own lived reality and letting it speak to the material: "Policies are not merely the performative acts of powerful collective actors but are also the result of the creative practices of a number of other actors - including the governed themselves - who engage with them voluntarily or because they are forced to." (Pero 2011: 244). On this front, the dissertation has brought the interrelated concepts of *translating up* and *translating down* into the policy process, which both contribute to flaws in transmission and loss of meaning in the state-building process. It is important to note that engagement with these processes has not been driven by an application of some pre-existing theory, but by analyzing field material and creation of a grounded theory based on the ethnographic fieldwork in Bosnia.

Finally, this study has also provided insights into contemporary social relations in Bosnia. It has been a snapshot of what Bosnian sociality looks like in the second decade after Dayton – in "Mature Dayton Bosnia" (Jansen et al., 2016). From this perspective, it has engaged the social

group of the 'internationals' and their interaction with the social ties and relations in Bosnia. Similar to power dynamics in post-colonial settings, it has been shown that the presence of the foreigners brings new class differences and collisions. Apart from these shifts, changes in labor dynamics signify the need for further adjustments on the part of the 'locals'. As Baker (2014) framed it, the newly emerged class of local 'projectariat' encompasses people who are used to living on short-term contracts and for whom informality provides a natural access into resources and employment. Furthermore, shedding light on the interpretive filters of *ko fol* and *ubleha* showed how informality contributes to jeopardizing the initiatives of civil society. By exposing the performative dynamic of exchange between NGOs associated in ACCOUNT and the international donors, this research relates to the previous critiques of NGOization as a trend in civil society development (Dzihic & Hamilton, 2012; Fagan, 2006, 2010; Stubbs, 2003, 2007).

Policy implications

This dissertation has embraced the view of the policy process in which "policies are contested practices that both reflect and create the social and cultural world in which they are embedded" (Shore and Wright 2011, Pero 2011: 244). In this sense, the present research has embraced the latourian turn and has departed from the assumption that policies are impersonal objects created by rational actors. It has extended the theoretical premises of the interpretive policy analysis (IPA), but also contributed in the arenas of practical policy making that are concerned with informality, management of informal ties and social capital, neighborhood democracy and (de)politicization on the local level. While the primary goal of my research has not been policy-driven, and has been more concerned with challenging taken-for-granted normative ideas rather than creating new ones, there is a set of lessons learnt that address the policy-making world. These can be grouped into:

(1) informality management within an international bureaucratic apparatus deployed in a contact zone (Pratt, 1992); and (2) informality management on the local ground.

First, when it comes to managing relations within a bureaucratic apparatus composed of people with various national and cultural backgrounds, the 'problems' that this research identified as impeding the results of state-building include the issue of internationality as a category of practice, and the dissonance between the emic and etic terms used in project formulation and implementation. The lesson learnt here is that sustainable development of institutions and civil society cannot be achieved without truly local ownership of these processes. Lack of active consideration for the local context and concerns, as well as lack of trust, has led to fake institutions and *ko fol* state-building. If international assistance in the state- and society- building is required for stabilization reasons, over an extended period of time, administrative structure of these organizations need to reflect the shifting priorities and requirements. In the example of Bosnia, major international agencies struggle between funding prerogatives coming from their headquarters and external donors and paying attention to real needs of the local population. Despite attempts to 'go local', externally imposed terms of cooperation usually take precedence over authentically local understanding. While local intermediaries play a crucial role in this communication process, it is advisable that they, too, have access to power and authority in the decision-making and policy formulation part of the policy cycle.

Second, as regards informality management on the local ground, in my research I have gathered empirical material that relates to the two opposing areas of policy intervention through externally formulated concepts. On one hand, through the frameworks of 'social capital' and 'social entrepreneurship', informal ties and associative life have been fostered in order to support active civic engagement in state and society. On the other hand, within the framework of 'corruption' and

related negative phenomena informality has been an object of repression through legal intervention. This framework has been ill-suited for the reality of post-conflict societies, such as Bosnia. The reliance on 'social capital' has resulted in support to civil society through creation of NGOs which cater to donor funding, and thus contribute to the process of NGO-ization (Stubbs 2007). This has created a new sector of employment but not necessarily a communication node between the needs of the society and the international agencies. The use of 'corruption' has led to a set of interventions that further alienated the international and local actors. Both of these frameworks have been too robust to capture local nuances and emic concepts, such as *štela*, *ubleha* and *ko fol*. In the policy translation process this has led to support exactly these phenomena rendered undesirable. In order to prevent these reverse effects, it is thus advisable to keep in mind the local concepts and understandings of informality, and base future project formulations on them rather than on the experience-distant concepts. For the local actors, in order to overcome problems associated with translating up, it is then recommended that they assume agency in communicating assertively the needs and concerns of the local ground.

Concluding remarks

At an anti-corruption workshop in Hotel Europe, organized by one of the NGOs associated in ACCOUNT in mid-May 2013, an anonymous participant engaged in some rare direct communication with the 'internationals' and their efforts to manage informality in Bosnia. Participants of the workshop were expected to focus on the question of 'How to increase governmental transparency in Bosnia and Herzegovina?' They were handed two sets of two sticky notes. On one yellow sticky note, they were supposed to write "what could governments do to

maintain the current level of transparency” and on one blue sticky note “what could it do to improve the level of transparency.” Then, in a similar fashion, on another yellow sticky note they were asked to write “what could the international community do to maintain the level of transparency” and on another blue note “what could the internationals do to improve it.” After writing, everyone stood up and put their sticky notes into the appropriate columns on the white board. After everyone was done, one of the organizers categorized answers into themes. There were only a few sticky notes that did not belong to a cluster of ideas: In the third column, “what could the internationals do to maintain the level of transparency”, a solitary blue sticky note advised “DO AS YOU PREACH”. As an improvement measure, another note recommended the following strategy: “1. DISMISS THE OHR. 2. EXIT BOSNIA.”

After the organizer read this answer out loud, a few people started laughing and their laughter gradually slipped into a spontaneous applause. In the context of my doctoral research, the content of this message to its collective addressee – the international community – is far less important than the act of addressing directly, even if anonymously, those in power. Since the end of my field research in 2013, I have visited Bosnia on a few occasions and have witnessed several acts of civic protest (spontaneous as well as planned) oriented towards the government. In those moments, I have witnessed that people in Bosnia no longer rely on someone else to transmit their words, but are willing to take to the streets and express their discontent with the *sistem*. I had started my doctoral research with an interest in *štela*. Following its incarnations among various, old and new, members of the Bosnian social landscape allowed me to uncover communicative processes that sabotage both the internationals' external state-building initiatives and locals' efforts at emancipation and self-empowerment. I am concluding this research in November 2015, twenty

years after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, with a hope that these absurd processes, just like *ko fol* state-building, *ubleha* and their etic equivalents, will soon be obsolete.

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